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The Boys Next Door: Progressing Disability Awareness And Representation Through Inclusive Production Practices

Shelby Lewis

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

THE BOYS NEXT DOOR: PROGRESSING DISABILITY
AWARENESS AND REPRESENTATION THROUGH
INCLUSIVE PRODUCTION PRACTICES

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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College of Performing and Visual Arts
School of Theatre Arts and Dance
Theatre Education

December 2018

This Thesis by: Shelby Lewis

Entitled: The Boys Next Door: *Progressing Disability Awareness and Representation Through Inclusive Production Practices*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in College of Performing and Visual Arts in School of Theatre and Dance, Program of Theatre Educator Intensive

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ABSTRACT

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The Boys Next Door was a progressive and popular piece of theatre when first produced in 1986 and remains a ripe tool for spreading disability consciousness if mounted with research and respect. Playwright, Tom Griffin, chronicles a series of amusing and meaningful events in the lives of four men with varying levels of cognitive impairments told through the lens of Jack Palmer, their able-bodied supervisor. The goal of this thesis production was to illuminate the opportunities, challenges, and considerations required to produce this play with a message that is progressive to the goals of the disability community rather than detrimental. Through the implementation of disability conscious production practices such as the direct involvement of the local disabled community, inclusive casting and hiring processes within the cast and crew, and honoring its time period as a history play within the disability theatrical canon, this production of *The Boys Next Door* granted actors and audience members alike the opportunity to experience a glimpse into the authentic disabled experience and witness the unsung abilities of individuals with disabilities who are, in fact, next door.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Goal of Thesis

Theatre as an art form is a compelling tool through which characters may share personal experiences in the hopes of bridging empathy and inspiring social action. This explains why there have been memorable milestones in pieces of theatre portraying the voices of certain groups that had previously been silenced, including the disabled community. Unfortunately, representation of the disabled experience onstage, and even onscreen in television and film, has remained largely simplistic and diminishing. As evidenced in a short film parody titled *Trailer for Every Oscar-Winning Movie Ever*, the smug, white, male, able-bodied protagonist is suddenly put upon by having to take care of a disabled character whose only speaking line is “Catchphrase!” Their relationship blossoms despite the inconvenience of dealing with this new frustrating yet warm-hearted sidekick, and subsequently—after words of wisdom unintentionally drop from the disabled character’s audibly affected voice—the protagonist gains a much-needed perspective and gets the girl. Produced in 2010, this piece encapsulated (and simultaneously capitalized on) the destructive trend of disability representation in the media by showcasing the disabled character as one who is the unbeknownst comic relief, always placed in the background, and played by an able-bodied actor. The experience of individuals that live with a variety of disabilities is not only deeply complex, but also

fiercely human. Failure to honor the diversity of any population's lived experience has surfaced as an offensive and unacceptable form of appropriation. There have been poignant efforts such as policy campaigns of the Disability Civil Rights Movement in the late 1980s as well as recent arts initiatives that intentionally commissioned disabled playwrights to write about their unique experiences. Thusly, the time has ripened for the wide spectrum of persons with visible and invisible disabilities to be seen, heard, and empowered on their own terms.

The Boys Next Door is one of the most popular disability plays of all time, and it continues to be regularly produced in the United States by amateur and professional theatres alike. Playwright Tom Griffin gives audiences a glimpse into the domestic existence of four male characters with varying levels of cognitive disabilities living together semi-independently in a group home. Their able-bodied caseworker, Jack, serves as narrator throughout and navigates the various opportunities and obstacles that Norman, Lucien, Barry, and Arnold encounter on a daily basis. Through a range of interactions with other characters in the cast, both disabled and abled, the playwright conjures a safe yet strikingly honest environment within which audiences may confront their own biases about and relationship with the subject of disability.

Cited as the most-produced play across the country in 1989, this well-intentioned work remains beloved by able-bodied audiences due to its undeniable humor and two highly effective moments of the show when three of the five impaired characters are freed from their physical and mental barriers and become momentarily abled—or what most consider, normal. Because of this miraculous element, however, casting requires that the disabled characters in this quintessential disability play are played by non-

disabled actors. This makes *The Boys Next Door* problematic for a contemporary staging, as does the fact that the play itself was written from an able-bodied voice.

When this play was written in 1986, it was undoubtedly progressive per the social landscape of its time. Never before had a play shown various sides of the morals, hopes, fears, dreams, failures, feelings of anger, and sincere romantic desires of individuals with disabilities. Rather than focusing on the characters' perceived impairments as something that defined them, this play allowed universal, human complexity and achieved unprecedented success despite a subject matter that had been generally considered uncomfortable to speak about. It also challenged the idea that all disabled were completely dependent on caretakers or that they should be treated as perpetual children. The Independent Living Movement, another name for the Disability Civil Rights Movement, had only genuinely begun in the United States at the end of the 1960s, so by the time this play was written in 1986, the idea of any handicapped person living independently was not yet widespread knowledge (Lewis xvii). *The Boys Next Door* showed audiences what independent living actually looked like for disabled individuals, thereby proving the efficacy of the social program and giving concrete examples that a life, even one with perceived handicaps, is worthwhile and productive.

This play has enjoyed consistently glowing accolades since its debut, touted as moving, “rewarding” (Dramatists), and “painfully touching” (Weinberg-Harter). However, one of the earliest reviews highlights a concern that must be addressed in the production of this play: the miraculous breakouts. D.J.R. Bruckner of *The New York Times* published the following in response to a first preview performance:

The retarded people in the play burst out of their world only twice. Lucien, the most troubled of the four men, . . . suddenly rises and eloquently says what it feels

like to be a middle-aged man with the mind of a confused child . . . The effect is stunning. . . . Those two characters are the only ones who become more complex and considerably more interesting.

Bruckner's use of the phrase "only twice" suggests that he wishes there were more instances when the disabled individuals became abled. The audiences are able to connect with the endearing characters in *The Boys Next Door* before then, but these moments give able-bodied audiences an extra feeling of affinity when the characters become like them. Each production must be conscious of whether this message is productive to the disabled community or whether it encourages ableist bias.

Another cause for concern in mounting this production was that the word, retarded, occurs frequently throughout the text of this play. As evidenced in Bruckner's review, it was considered at the time to be the blanket medical term for anyone with a developmental delay. Today, the R word now carries a disturbing weight for the disabled community—similar to the N word in black communities. Each production must address its use in the dialogue and its poignant place in the conversation around disability. The presence of the R word arguably requires that *The Boys Next Door* be treated as a disability *history* play—that is, one clearly set in the past. Such exposure to a currently upsetting term could be constructive if handled with respect and thoughtfulness. At the risk of audiences becoming desensitized to its offensive nature, the potency of hearing such a taboo word could also honor how far society has come in *not* using that word any longer and thereby reinforce its banishment.

The goal of this thesis was to illuminate the necessary considerations to ensure a respectful, conscious, and productive production of *The Boys Next Door*, hence defining more broadly what makes a quality disability play. Its warm reputation and easy-to-

mount production elements classify it as a continually solid choice for schools and theatres of all levels to produce. However, its outdated terminology and assumptive message of discarding some characters' disabilities means extra care must be given to the message it sends both to the disabled and abled communities. With these intentions, a production of *The Boys Next Door* was mounted in northern Michigan. The research and reflection from participants, members of the community, and audience members proved to be contributing factors in promoting awareness of and learning what can help towards the progress of highly individualized persons with disabilities.

Purpose and Significance of Study

Kevin Kling, an internationally renowned author, playwright, storyteller, and disability advocate, speaks regularly about the first memory of his disability. At age three, doctors were attempting to address the child's congenital birth defect and searching for a cure. Kevin had a left arm that was about three-quarters the size of his right arm. When the doctors took his parents aside and offered to fix it for him, the emboldened toddler declared "Hands off! Don't touch my funky arm" (Kling). In a keynote speech at the American Alliance for Theatre Education's symposium on Best Practices for Inclusive and Accessible Theatre, Kling explained, "Whatever makes you different gives you superpowers. And disabled kids know this." Examples like this abound about the often-incorrect perception of the disabled experience by able-bodied individuals. Plays like *The Boys Next Door* and its contemporaries in the disability canon assist in breaking down those assumptions by showing what quality of life someone with disabilities can have and challenge the generally-held ableist belief that those whom are disabled would prefer not to be. This is why the discussion around the abilities of the disabled is more

important than ever. Another tender yet poignant story Kling shared revolved around a young girl in a classroom around the time of Thanksgiving. The student activity was to trace the fingers of both hands and make two turkeys with five feathers from five fingers. This young girl had two fingers on one of her hands and, upon reviewing the student's work, her teacher realized her oversight and offered the young girl the opportunity to fix it. She did, by redrawing both turkeys with two feathers.

The very nature of a disability, in fact, depends on the society that is disabling it. If a city were made of ramps, for example, those in wheelchairs would be able to arrive faster than anyone else. Society's perception of someone being less than, and its subsequent lack of accommodation for said person, is what ultimately disables them. Therefore, at its essence, disability is a social construct. In her book *Drama and Diversity*, Sharon Grady quotes Access Austin Arts as a reminder that "disabilities don't handicap—attitudes and architecture do" (146). Disability, therefore, does not automatically mean inability, but rather able in another way. Talleri McRae, an artist, educator, disability scholar, and inclusion specialist, ascribes to the belief that access and innovation go hand in hand. In her essay entitled "Paradoxes of Disability and Inclusion," she states:

When many people think about disability, they think about physical and mental limitations that some individuals possess. However, another view of disability asks: How does society limit people who are different or "abnormal" from participating in life? While physical, sensory, intellectual, or psychological variations may cause individuals to have functional limitations, these impairments do not have to lead to *disability* [sic] unless society fails to include people regardless of their individual differences. (1)

Even on the website through which to apply for the production rights of *The Boys Next Door*, the description's ableist skew is present, insisting that "the handicapped . . . want

only to laugh and love and find some meaning and purpose in the brief time that they, like their more *fortunate* brothers [emphasis added], are allotted on this earth” (Dramatists). The most successful aspect, then, of *The Boys Next Door* is that its depiction of the everyday normalizes the experience of disability as opposed to sensationalizing it. It is true that this tight knit group of men deal with issues that pertain directly to their disability, but they also deal with the so-called normal awkwardness that comes on a first date or the so-called normal struggle to let something go for the benefit of another and, ultimately, oneself. Griffin’s play is about the opportunity and necessity of looking at this population from a different angle.

Boasting nearly 3,500 productions as of 2016 (Meigs), *The Boys Next Door* has been a worthy step in bringing awareness to the struggles, opportunities, and potentially surprising abilities of highly individualized persons within the disabled experience. In producing this play now, the more advanced goal was to capitalize on its attractive recognition to inspire increased attendance for this dialogue, spark the conversation of well-meaning yet disempowering attitudes and practices within the local community, and pave the way for new disability plays with authentic voices and ability-minded inclusion to be actively pursued and well-received for the benefit of a variety of disabled communities, locally and nationally.

Review of Literature

Though Tom Griffin’s play offers some problematic elements for a contemporary cast, crew, and audience, the popularity it garnered upon its 1987 premiere was indicative of the social progress of the time that had made significant steps for the rights and recognition of disabled individuals. Since 1985, author and then-reporter James I.

Charlton witnessed countless devastating examples of direct and indirect oppression, poverty, and marginalization brought about by the alienation of the needs and desires of the disabled across the globe. In his foundational text *Nothing About Us Without Us: Disability Oppression and Empowerment* written in 1998, Charlton reveals the realities of how the disabled are treated and the inherent, destructive beliefs that able-bodied societies perpetuate—knowingly or unknowingly. “Nothing about us without us” became a powerful slogan for the then-called Disability Rights Movement (DRM), insisting on independence and integration, and “demanding a recognition of their human rights and their central role in determining those rights” (Lewis ix). Quoting Ed Roberts, one of the leading figures of the international effort, “If we have learned one thing from the civil rights movement in the U.S., it’s that when others speak for you, you lose” (Charlton 3).

Ed Roberts is one of the most influential disability advocates in history and is often referred to as the father of the Independent Living Movement. Paralyzed from the neck down at age fourteen due to polio and thence dependent on a respirator to breathe, in 1962 he was the first severely disabled student to attend the University of Colorado at Berkeley. He was accepted reluctantly by the institution, as evidenced by the admissions official’s statement: “We’ve tried cripples before and it didn’t work” (Dawson). He was assigned a room in an empty wing of the student infirmary because none of the dormitory floors could support the weight of his 800-pound iron lung (a metal tank and pump that assisted in breathing). Within five years, as he first pursued his B.A. in political science, followed by his M.A. and doctorate, twelve more students with post-polio symptoms or spinal-cord injuries had joined Roberts living in the hospital. The group became known as the Rolling Quads. Their camaraderie and innovation prompted them to establish the

first ever Center for Independent Living (CIL) a few blocks from campus. Following that example, from 1972 to 1975, hundreds of independent living centers sprang up across the county. Most of the group houses in the United States, such as the setting of the group home featured in *The Boys Next Door*, were established in the early 1980s. Because of their extensive resources and its being a concrete example of the DRM's actualized philosophy of independent living, they were considered to be one of the most important organizational achievements for the progress of disabled individuals (Charlton 131–132). This spawned international efforts of the DRM as well. The current Policy and Research Manager on the board of the Neurological Alliance of Ireland, Gráinne McGettrick, cites the importance of what the Irish Disability Movement defines as disability consciousness. This chiefly includes parameters for what the non-disabled should and should not do when hoping to be of assistance to the furthering of the DRM. McGettrick believes able-bodied persons can be useful allies, but only with the appropriate training. Even the most well-intentioned attempts to help can be destructive.

In the 2006 anthology *Beyond Victims and Villains: Contemporary Plays by Disabled Playwrights*, editor and introduction author Victoria Ann Lewis described a memorable meeting with a high-level executive in 1978 for an article she was preparing on the employment opportunities for disabled people in his field of computer programming. Due to his physical impairments from cerebral palsy, the man drove an electric wheelchair. At an intersection after the interview, Lewis recalls:

As we waited for the light to change, a woman dropped some change into the executive's lap. Apparently for this charitable passerby the only explanation for the presence of a significantly disabled person in a public setting was that he must be a beggar. . . . To any person with a disability, contempt is the flip side of pity [and] the 'charitable gesture' can be as cruel as it is kind. (xiv)

Exposing the fact that grateful, desperate, hyper-chipper stereotypes of the disabled are perpetuated on stage and screen, and even in the coverage of public figures such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Lewis argues that society tells us that “good disabled people observe a code of silence about their physical needs and conditions and exhibited a cheerful, energetic demeanor in public life” (xix) as if one’s quality of life only requires an attitude adjustment.

The religious model of disability depiction was likely the most potent tool in spreading the prejudice that the disabled community battles to this day. Such messages included deafness caused by choruses of devils speaking into children’s ears, mothers burned at the stake as witches if their child was born with a physical deformity, and even, in the medieval period, the idea that a spinal disfigurement meant the presence of the devil curled up inside the hump (xxi). Though the freak shows of the 1800s did not necessarily strive to progress the rights of their lot, those establishments at best provided marginalized individuals an option away from institutionalization and a place in which to be systematically emboldened for their difference. Core myths of disability being inherently negative extend all the way back to the Bible when, upon seeing a blind man, the Pharisees asked, “Who has sinned? This man or his parents?”—implying that blindness was a result of sin.

One of the plays Lewis has included in her anthology entitled *P.H. *freaks* tells a story about Lia Graf, a little person circus performer in the 1920s and 1930s. She was a celebrity in her touring career but, upon returning home to Germany, was arrested as a Useless Person in 1937, sent to Auschwitz, and never heard from again (Baizley 76). Whether playing the stereotypical cheerful cripple who is just happy to be alive no matter

the struggle or the bitter cripple looking to take revenge on the world, these two ends of the dramatic spectrum have been the only roles available for representation of disability in the media until recent years. Yet, despite major advancements, Lewis challenges theatrical participants who are engaged in this dialogue to consider how often disability has been used exploitatively as a dramatic tool.

Consider the ease of considering good vs. evil by the addition of a hook, peg leg or eye patch, [or the] counseling [of] fledgling authors to give their villain a limp or an amputated limb. This ‘twisted body, twisted mind’ approach to characterization has given us such unforgettable villains such as Richard III or Dr. Strangelove. . . . The typecasting of the person with a disability has been set for centuries—either ‘victim’ or ‘villain.’ (xxii, xv)

The example of *Richard III*, specifically, stands as a continual paradox for the disabled community as a figure of both heroism and evil. Emma MacLean explains in her dissertation *Freak, Out!: Disability Representation in Theatre* that, on one hand, Richard III is an absolute hero to anyone who has ever been bullied or made to feel inadequate because of a condition that cannot be helped. His tactics are undoubtedly sinister, but his opening soliloquy illuminates what frustrations have driven him to this extremity of revenge—nearly convincing the audience that he has earned the right to rebel in this way. He then strategically uses his disability—the very element that lead to his ostracism—to his advantage.

He is described as ‘monstrous’ and ‘deformed’ yet his impairment does not disable him from seizing absolute political power. . . . Richard knows when to deploy his disability and when to hide it. . . . Rather than deny his weakness, Richard flaunts it thereby turning it into a strength. (26, 29)

And yet, because of how he takes his crown, he is showcased and condemned as a villain. In essence, disability becomes the villain. William Shakespeare was commissioned to write about a twisted king from the past and it was no coincidence that he exaggerated the

monarch's haphazard physicality to appease his current patron. The stigmas of disability are long-standing and extreme.

Unlike *Richard III* and such quintessential disability films as *Rain Man*, *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*, *My Left Foot*, or *Of Mice and Men*, which only have one disabled character, *The Boys Next Door* is a multi-character drama, offering an opportunity for a complex presentation of the social life and diverse views of disabled individuals rather than sustaining the idea of solitude or one accommodation or label fits all. Such a consideration drove a key element of this production's concept: presenting it as a disability history play. This required this production to set the action *visibly* in the 1980s through period costumes, detailed set dressing, and extensive educational materials in order to remove any encouragement of the potentially insensitive overtones of certain terminology and behavior from being used in the modern day. Presenting *The Boys Next Door* as a history play within the continuum of the disability play genre allows for this group of boys to educate cast, crew, and audience from their own, diverse perspective.

The other aspect of this production's concept that made it significant was the use of ability-diverse and neurodiverse casting. By intentionally inviting and involving individuals who live the disability experience, it bridged the gap of realism due to the able-bodied voice of the playwright. It also allowed for increased community engagement with local disabled groups, encouraged the production itself to be trusted more by those representatives and their families, and served as a constant resource and standards-check for the production as it strived to represent the disabled community with the utmost respect and accuracy. In the words of the Disability Rights Movement, the intention was to do "nothing about them without them."

This effort of inclusive casting speaks to a larger trend, or rather debate, in the theatrical and cinematic casting industry: whether able-bodied actors should be allowed to play disabled roles as well as whether disabled actors, if given the chance, would actually be able to play able-bodied roles at all. A recent triumph of sorts within the disability play roster was the 2015 Tony Award-winner for Best Play, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* by Simon Stephens. Alex Sharp won the Tony Award for Best Actor for his portrayal of fifteen-year-old math genius and amateur detective Christopher, a character who is on the Autism spectrum. He was an able-bodied actor cast in a disabled role, and reported in interviews to have done “a lot of research,” explaining that he “approached the character with empathy . . . Not to portray him as someone with a disability, but . . . as someone who’s different” (Firman). Sharp’s immediate successor, Tyler Lea, also did “a great deal of research, including paying a visit to QSAC [Quality Services for the Autism Community] . . . where he participated in a life skills class and spoke with many of the students” (Clement). The current body of research regarding the responsibility of disability representation, however, suggests that such a minimal level of engagement may not be enough.

HowlRound contributor and autistic actor Sam Ethan Rubin writes that, though Autism awareness is at an all-time high and more characters than ever are being shown in the media to reflect that social change, “it is still the case in 2018 . . . that most autistic roles are generally not cast with autistic actors” and that such an oversight fails in showing the “many faces of autism.” He admits that many casting directors may not be aware that the Autism spectrum is extremely wide and one end of it is more capable than neurotypicals expect. This also calls into question the issue of disclosure—whether to tell

the casting director or not at the audition that the actor is autistic. Mickey Rowe is an actor who broke that barrier by being the first autistic performer cast to star in a regional, professional production of *Curious Incident*. In his own *HowlRound* essay entitled “Our Differences Are Our Strengths: Neurodiveristy in Theatre,” Rowe reveals that acting is actually extremely comfortable for him because autistics’ daily lives are trained to be completely scripted in order to fit into the expected behavior patterns of a neurotypical world: “The roles are incredibly clear, logical, and laid out. . . . The conversations onstage are scripted, and written much better than the ones in my real life. On the street is where conversations are scary—those roles aren’t clear.” Rubin rounds the argument for inclusion with a bold challenge to the industry:

Autism isn’t just peeking under the curtain here; it’s ripped the curtain down. It’s insisting on being invited to play. The moment for seeking out neurodiverse actors is now. . . . Give me and other non-neurotypical actors a chance to show you our reliability, our wit, our intellect, our vulnerability, our spirit. We might just surprise you. (Rubin)

The National Health Center for Health Statistics released a new report in November 2016 that estimates that Autism affects one in thirty-six individuals—which is radically different from when Rubin was diagnosed in 1997 as one in ten thousand. Most doctors see this upswing in incidents as worthy of outrage and further vindication for finding a cure (Sears), but not all persons with Autism wish to be cured.

“The parents want the cure, most Aspys don’t, and the doctors just want jobs,” said Cody Clark, a full-time professional magician with Aspergers and disability self-advocate. He tours the country with his solo show *Cody Clark: A Different Way of Thinking* and uses magic, comedy, and storytelling to share the autistic experience from his point of view. In a personal interview, responding specifically to a question about

how he may feel observing a few of the characters in *The Boys Next Door* miraculously breaking out of their disabilities, Clark assured that “that is an honest feeling sometimes. Overall, I don’t want my autism cured, but most people with disabilities at some point wish they were normal or neurotypical.” He shares Rubin and Rowe’s concerns when it comes to disability representation in the arts, especially in television and film. Many people’s first exposure to Autism was *Rain Man*, but Clark asserts that Dustin Hoffman’s portrayal was not done with respect. “Dustin [has] not been an advocate for the autism community. It was just for him to get the Oscar.” The infamy of awards being given to disabled performances is widely known. Entertainment industry online publication *IndieWire* reported in early 2017 that an estimated fifty-nine actors received Academy Award nominations for portraying disabled characters, and notes that half of them won (Thompson). “The Academy is sort of being lazy,” Clark adds. “They want obvious acting.”

Portrayal of the struggles of disabled individuals has tugged profusely at the heartstrings of able-bodied audiences. The symptom of that experience, though, has historically been little more than the righteous charitable gesture instead of using one’s privilege in an able-bodied world to create productive change. Since the DRM began, individuals with disabilities of all kinds “decided to throw off the invisibility clock of shame and reclaim the negative term ‘disability’ as a badge of pride and power” (Lewis xix). One such example can be found in the Deaf Pride movement—a population of individuals that does not consider themselves disabled at all.

Based on the fact that they share a common and separate language, [they] constitute a ‘linguistic minority’ . . . and [believe] deaf and hard-of-hearing theatre should be considered bilingual along with groups such as El Teatro Campesino. (xviii)

Assuming that disabled individuals desire to shake their impairment is the racial equivalent of assuming that people of color wish to be without their ethnicity's skin tone. In disabled playwright Mike Irving's comedy *The History of Bowling*, a disgruntled disabled student challenges a black street preacher by drawing a parallel between their two perceived 'conditions':

CHUCK: And he says to me, "You better get right with Jesus, or he ain't never gonna make you walk!" . . . Who the hell does he think he is? So I turned to him and I said, "You better get right with Jesus, or he ain't never gonna make you white!"

The correlations between racism and disability prejudice are worth noting, as both are marginalized groups that have had to fight for equality and accurate representation.

The other disempowering pattern of behavior is verbiage surrounding the inspiration brought about by optically inclusive environments. In *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, Alex Sharp's Broadway successor Lea, for example, asserts that Christopher "gives people hope" because "he doesn't give up, against his differences" (Clement). For able-bodied audiences in general, any feat of normality can be particularly moving, but perhaps those "feats" are more emotionally affecting than the acts themselves merit. In the 2006 Canadian documentary film *Shameless: The Art of Disability*, one physically disabled actor shares that "people are inspired no matter what you do. I could go up there and take a dump and they'll say 'oh, you're so courageous.'" In 2012, a woman named Stella Young coined that ableist habit with this phrase: inspiration porn. Diagnosed with a brittle bone disease known as osteogenesis imperfecta, Young is an Australian comedian, journalist, and activist whose TED Talk in April 2014 was a stirring catalyst for the able-bodied community to examine the potentially destructive nature of its tendency to see the disabled through a hyper-sympathetic lens.

Inspiration porn is defined as “the calling of people with disabilities inspirational solely or in part because of their disabilities” and Young defends the use of the word, porn, by stating that this behavior “objectifies one group of people for the benefit of another” (Weiner). Common examples of this phenomenon include Facebook montage videos showcasing diverse disabilities accompanied by touching quotes about adversity or television shows employing a token wheelchair-ridden sidekick to deliver just the right perspective in the apropos moment to aid the hero in becoming their best self. The chief danger of such a portrayal of the disabled community lies in its patronizing proposal of the function of disabled individuals. It suggests somehow that their main purpose is to inspire the abled—in essence saying, “go forth and do what we can’t!” A 2017 article in *The Huffington Post* highlighted a particularly poignant moment for the confrontation of this ignorant form of behavior. It mentions a clip from the ABC sitcom *Speechless* in which the disabled character calls out a fellow classmate’s compulsion of inspiration porn and declares: “I blame Tiny Tim.” This ableist belief system perpetuates a lesser-than quality in the lives of the disabled and strengthens the separation between those who live with and without particular obstacles. “All disabled people want is to be accepted for who they are, impairment and all. . . . [Disability] is not something to overcome. It’s something that exists. . . . Existing is not an accomplishment” (Weiner).

The disabled assert that they do not exist to give the able-bodied inspiration, a dose of perspective, or “remind the species of the species” as one of the characters in *The Boys Next Door* controversially states (Griffin 52). This is why Tom Griffin’s play earned its place in DRM history by being one of the first disability-centric theatrical experiences to permeate the national and global consciousness. As such, it remains a powerful

introductory tool by appealing to able-bodied audiences just enough to then begin a new and progressive dialogue with the authentic disabled voice.

Methodology

This production of *The Boys Next Door* was a community-driven effort from the title selection by the Artistic Committee of the theatre through the efforts of inclusive casting and local engagement. In order to ensure the integrity of the specific goals to mount this show in a respectful and thoughtful way, like-minded designers, production team members, and auditioning performers were vetted to ensure that their intentions and sensitivity levels were conducive to the goals of this production. Thus, those selected were able to contribute to the journey both as artists and civic partners. They were also informed immediately upon commencement of rehearsals that at least one sensory-friendly production would be happening during the run so they could prepare themselves for any changes needed and even incorporate the standards of a universal experience into their original designs and portrayals.

Community integration was key to the success and potency of the awareness this production strived to accomplish, so select pillars of influential disability organizations throughout Michigan were contacted. A few such contacts included the following: high school special education teacher at Glen Lake Community Schools Dana Schlosser, transition coordinator for the Traverse Bay Area Intermediate School District (TBA ISD) Mimi Kinney—who also offered to serve on the production’s Inclusion Committee—and Diane Willcox, director of marketing and communications at the Wharton Center for Performing Arts through Michigan State University. Prior to casting, a point was made to visit local disability-serving locations. This provided an opportunity for ability-diverse

and neurodiverse individuals to feel welcome at auditions and allowed the production team to inquire as to what extra accommodations their population may have needed in order to prepare for the casting process.

Many of the actors chosen for the cast were genuinely committed to portraying their characters with accuracy and respect, but (whether the actors were abled or disabled) the only way to accomplish that authenticity was to interact with actual people with disabilities rather than simply do research through documentaries or films—especially those roles depicted by able-bodied actors. As disability self-advocate Kevin Kling cautioned, “If you don’t find a person, you’ll grow a persona,” meaning that without honoring the specificity of a unique individual, there is a risk of generalizing a person’s identity and therefore deteriorating the perception of a disabled individual down to only their disability. Since the idea or academic study of disability was not as helpful as the live experience of it, once rehearsals began, both abled and disabled cast members were required to interview and spend at least one full day with an individual that had the disability they were portraying in their character. There was a survey given at the beginning of the rehearsal process and another near-identical questionnaire at the end of the process to chart the different levels of awareness and understanding of the disabled experience in northern Michigan and in general. Talkbacks were held after Thursday night performances involving a Q&A session with the director, all actors, and any disabled members of the production team who wished to join and share their perspectives.

The venue that housed this production was a community theatre in Traverse City, Michigan, established almost sixty years ago. Performance spaces include a 277-seat

main stage auditorium (where *The Boys Next Door* was staged) and an eighty-seat black box studio theatre. The seasonal attendance ranges from 20,000 to 23,000 patrons. Apart from six paid staff members, this nonprofit organization is entirely volunteer-based. Managing the schedules and interest of volunteers was a delicate balance. The production was grateful for their enthusiasm and commitment, but there was no solid professional contract holding them accountable for exact rehearsal times or attending the outside work with the disabled community. A thoughtful initiative like this, then, required embracing experiences that were different and more extensive than a typical community theatre rehearsal process dictates, which proved to be an uphill battle from both the cast and administration in terms of time commitment. Since the production went up during the last three weeks in September, auditions (generally held eight weeks before opening) were in the middle of July. As Traverse City is a tourism-driven town that sits on Lake Michigan, it was sometimes problematic for both full cast attendance and ticket sales.

Even with the less-than-full houses due to the time of year, the audiences that were able to attend the show left the theatre with an experience that had been fulfilling, entertaining, and thought-provoking, as some articulated in written reactions through the theatre's website. Of foremost importance, the attendees from the disabled community—including disabled individuals, their families, caretakers, resource teachers, etc.—provided positive and constructive feedback about the production's efforts and simply about the production qualities themselves. Both abled and disabled members of the community acknowledged, admired, and appreciated the intent for inclusion. As the Australian Development and Disability Consortium (ADDC) says of their own action research in their publication *Voices of the Marginalized*: “the empowering nature of the

participatory approach is a core aspect of the overall project given the isolation, discrimination and marginalization experienced by the participants as a result of their disability” (13).

As intended, the audience began to see the individuals depicted in *The Boys Next Door* as full human beings rather than abstract medical terminologies. The character of Norman, for example, should be seen not as that of a high-functioning specimen with a developmental delay who struggles through life. He should instead be acknowledged as an admirable, determined man who has a weakness for donuts and a relatable crush on the girl next door. Even at the amateur level, this level of heightened awareness and sensitivity is crucial for the success of plays like *The Boys Next Door* that seek to illuminate the disabled experience. With its elements of inclusion through neurodiverse casting and community engagement, this production strived to be an ally for educated and open-minded disability consciousness. The dialogue itself furthered the awareness of independence, innovation, and assumed competence within the disabled community to satisfy both the artistic and civic duty of a performance involving disability representation. The text has always been inherently heartwarming and heartbreaking for audiences, but thoughtful steps taken out of respect for the disabled community assured this particular mounting would be equally activating. This production of *The Boys Next Door* was therefore productive and progressive in the realm of social change for the disabled experience within the community of northern Michigan, and the script itself holds that same potential in any local community it is chosen for as long as the production executes it with the necessary accuracy and respect.

CHAPTER II

DRAMATURGICAL PROTOCOL

Glossed Playscript

All references below refer to The Dramatic Publishing Company's version of Tom Griffin's *The Boys Next Door*. Bibliographic Information:

Griffin, Tom. *The Boys Next Door*. Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1988, PDF file, www.deltastage.com/BNDScrip%20001.pdf. Accessed 10 Aug. 2015.

First Responses

The Boys Next Door is a tough play to produce effectively. The setting is simple, the language is commonplace (though expertly crafted), and the characters have proven their potency for over twenty years, so the entire success or downfall of the show lies on the actors' portrayal. There is some mayhem in the action, but the narrative all sits atop an electric intimacy that must be earned. Only then does the audience feel comfortable enough to surrender to the subject matter and the beautiful, worthwhile souls of the characters. The job is to give them a test round in a safe and welcoming environment, so the next time they encounter someone with a disability, they will be equipped with insight, tools, and empathy.

Pluses

1. Humor. The pure enjoyment of this play is undeniable. A comedy is an easier sell in general, and this one in particular delivers punch after punch of farcical hilarity.

2. Heart. The heart-tugging warmth of this play is equally irrefutable. It takes the audience on an emotional rollercoaster and drops them off fully satisfied.
3. Cast Flexibility. These characters have been portrayed by high school actors, young adults/college students, and middle-aged performers alike. Race is mentioned in the character notes as the characters enter. Lucien is black and is also confirmed as dark-skinned by Mr. Klemper, but nothing else in the script prohibits any ethnicity from playing any other role. The gender of the characters was changed in some recent productions, yet care should be taken when making the decision to gender-bend since male-female dynamics are core to the story.
4. Contemporary Language. The dialogue is straightforward and contains no archaic verse.
5. Simple Setting. Largely being set in one lively living room makes the play easy to mount in a wide variety of theatrical venues: black box or full-size mainstage, proscenium or three-quarter thrust.
6. Family Friendly. The only curse words in the script are “goddamn” and “bitch,” uttered by Mr. Klemper (Barry’s abusive father) in one scene. Jack also says “goddamn” twice when he loses his temper at the dance.
7. Loveable Characters. Spectators can empathize with every character in some way. They are sympathetic and complex. None of the boys are saints, but *all* have the potential to steal the hearts of the audience.
8. Meaty Acting Roles. The boys, Jack, and Sheila are all delicious, artistically fulfilling characters to portray. Additionally, the playwright intentionally layered the supporting characters so no actor would play a small role.

9. Fantasy Sequences/Meta-theatrical Moments. The shocking yet magical moments of wish fulfillment in the script are striking, thought provoking, and memorable.
10. Non-Preachy Message. Jack's direct address speeches articulate both perspectives, providing ample evidence as to why his current professional position is both exhausting and rewarding. Coupled with Arnold's whimsical ending, the play neatly wraps up the journey, leaving the audience thoughtful but content; not quite taxed, but subtly challenged.

Minuses

1. Tough Opening. Arnold's neurotic tirade that begins the show is meant to be abrasive and confusing, but the audience still needs to somehow receive a warm enough welcome.
2. Episodic Scenes. Some reviewers cite the play's structure as choppy because its sequence of short scenes could continuously interrupt the momentum. However, such bite-sized action could be seen as necessary since every scene has the tendency to become heightened very quickly. It gives the audience intermittent breathers and keeps the pace flying.
3. Casting the Disabled Roles. Five characters—the boys and Sheila—are mentally handicapped in their own way. The chief concern for anyone putting on this production is finding actors who possess the talent, respect, and sensitivity required to take expert care of these characters. Their performances must be funny yet not campy, and sincere yet not overdone. They cannot be too simplified (meaning only skimming one level of research) nor too sensationalized (to the point that the audience fears that they are laughing *at* these characters rather than

with them). There is a strong need for extensive research, a tight, trusting ensemble and whole-hearted commitment in order to pull off performances with all due respect.

4. **Subject Matter/Sensitivity.** Assuming the actors do a superb job, the rest falls to the audience. Depending on each audience member's experience, or lack thereof, with someone with cognitive disabilities, they see a different show. Making sure that the able-bodied and disabled audience members are appropriately represented and well served is important.
5. **The Word Retarded.** The play is set in the 1980s, when retarded was merely a clinical term and did not have the derogatory meaning it has since absorbed. Nothing else about the play obviously indicates the 1980s, so in the absence of a clear period setting, the R word may confuse or upset some audience members.
6. **Prop Heavy.** The play begins with four grocery bags full of items and the list of props increases exponentially from there. The props master must acquire a large amount, and the actors and backstage crew must keep track of numerous props.
7. **Costume Specifics.** The dress is generally modern day, but there are some specific clothing items that may not be found in a typical pull that could require purchasing (e.g. Norman's donut shop uniform, Lucien's Spiderman tie, and Barry's golf outfit).
8. **Jack's Speeches to the Audience.** Many reviewers have pointed out Jack's direct addresses to the audience as being the least compelling (or at worst, most annoying) parts of the show. The writing is certainly not as strong in these

moments, but it also does not help that this ringleader is introduced on the worst few days of his job.

9. Casting the Role of Jack. Casting Jack must be strategic. He is the audience's connection, but also serves as the mirror to those who have also allowed their frustration to override their understanding in situations with the disabled community. The able-bodied audience sees themselves in him for better and worse. His heart of gold must be evident, open, and charming above all. The spectators' hearts must break with his as he says goodbye to the boys.
10. Taxing Performance Requirements for Actors. Any physical comedy can be draining, but the various levels of extremes that these characters go through are exhausting to portray—mentally, physically and emotionally.
11. Non-specified Disabilities. The playwright never specifies which exact conditions three of the boys have; only that Norman, Arnold, and Lucien are, indeed, retarded. Further research into their neurological challenges suggest that Norman and Lucien have Down syndrome or are on extreme ends of the Autism spectrum; Norman as high-functioning (perhaps Asperger's) and Lucien as low-functioning. Arnold is called "marginal . . . depressive by trade" (17) but appears to live with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). Barry is named as having Schizophrenia. Extensive research must ensue for very specific decisions to be made about the conditions of each character. Mr. Klemper also has a physical disability.
12. Barry's Scene with his Father. While arguably the most effective moments in the play are the two breaks from disability, the scene in which one of the boys collapses into the depth of his seemingly benign disability is probably the most

difficult to watch, as it contains swearing, screaming, visceral anger, and even physical violence. Both actors and audience must be taken care of properly.

Questions

1. In the speeches said directly to the audience, who are Jack, Arnold, and Lucien talking to?
2. Should the actors watch the movie version in preparation?
3. Should the 1986 setting be adhered to? If so, what would it add or take away from the production?
4. What are the ideal ages for each character? Are they all the same age or is there a diverse range of ages throughout the cast?
5. Where is the best place for the show to be produced?
 - a. Amateur Community Theatre
Pluses: Production slot easier to secure; total creative freedom
Minuses: Level of talent pool
 - b. Professional Theatre Company
Pluses: Attracts top talent in performance and design
Minuses: Harder sell to a company with many choices for their season
 - c. Artistic Institution (High School/College)
Pluses: School resources and support; great learning experience for students
Minuses: Younger age may not be mature enough to handle delicacies involved with portraying differently-abled characters
6. What is the best way to incorporate and assure the disabled community of this production's intentions and overall result?
7. What is the first laugh of the show?
8. What do the boys (i.e. those on stage) do when Jack is speaking to the audience?
9. How long has Jack had this job?

10. Jack supervises five apartments total. Is this group his favorite or his most taxing?
11. What disabilities do these characters have specifically?
12. What other references are available in regards to disability portrayed in theatre?
 - a. Lenny, *Of Mice and Men*
 - b. Christopher, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*
 - c. Laura, *The Glass Menagerie*
13. What is the difference between Jack-at-work and Jack-speaking-in-monologues?
14. In what exact moment does Jack make the decision to finally leave?
15. Is there anything to be gleaned from reading/studying Tom Griffin's other plays?
16. What song are Norman and Sheila dancing to? What kind of music would the boys listen to, thereby serving as a basis for the production's sound design: preshow, scene changes, final bows?
17. How should the fantasy sequences/breaks from reality be handled?
18. Why does the play end with Russia? Does Arnold finally get a nominal fantasy sequence of his own?

Clues

1. Fantasy Sequences. In these moments, the disabilities disappear. They are magical and no doubt account for this play's endearing and enduring success. The able-bodied audience has felt separate from the characters' experience until then, but that moment of brief connection brings them both relief and further remorse, which hopefully alchemizes to empathy by the end of the evening.

2. The Word Retarded. Audiences should viscerally reject that word as soon as it is uttered, proving how far society has come in terms of disability awareness and sensitivity and challenging them on how much farther there is to go.
3. Working with the Mentally Disabled. In-person, interactive research must be done by the cast and creative team for accuracy, perspective, and increased respect.
4. Humor. The fact that this play is hilarious is the warmest “welcome to our home” (Griffin 23) that Norman and his friends can offer an audience.

Imagery

Keys—Donuts—Books
 Rats—Flowers—Russia
 Social Dance—Courtroom—Family
 Dad—Visitors—Door
 Welcome Mat—Wheaties—Groceries
 Golf Club—Golf Ball—Puppets
 Elementary Colors—Spiderman Tie—Surprise Party
 Romance—Insecurity—Joy

Concretes

1. Group homes, like the one the boys live in, do exist and people with mental and physical handicaps do hold down jobs, have relationships, etc.
2. Each of the characters has individual dreams, insecurities, fears, desires, coping mechanisms, and even manipulative tactics (i.e. tricks) to get what they want.

Aiding a disabled person to thrive in an able-bodied world is a daily challenge.

Supplements to the Playscript/ Areas of Inquiry

Source Studies

Tom Griffin cited only his personal experiences as source material for *The Boys Next Door* and even admitted the liberty he took with it: “Of course, a lot of this play is

invented. I did what all writers do: Start with a story someone tells you—and when you finish, it’s unrecognizable” (Arkatov). Between growing up around the mentally disabled children in his neighborhood and, as an adult, hearing stories from a friend who worked as an administrator of a group home like the one in the play, Griffin creatively formed this cherished script of relationship and empathy.

Glossary

The definitions below are quoted from or confirmed by Merriam Webster Dictionary (www.m-w.com), Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org), or Urban Dictionary (www.urbandictionary.com).

aberration: a problem or type of behavior that is unusual or unexpected (44)

African violet: small East African plant with heart-shaped velvety leaves and violet, pink or white flowers; symbolic of spirituality, protection; ‘folklore says the violet connotes a love that is delicate’; Victorian floriography (the language of flowers) assigns a meaning of retiring modesty (32)

agriculture: farming; science of cultivating soil, producing crops raising livestock (14)

a la carte: with a separate price for each item on the menu (65)

amnesia: loss of memory due to brain injury, shock, fatigue, repression or illness; perhaps Arnold means insomnia? (51)

angina: a heart disease that causes brief periods of intense chest pain (59)

apathetic: not having or showing much emotion or interest (12)

appealed: a process in law in which parties request a formal change to an official decision (21)

arthritis: a disease that causes the joints of the body to become swollen and painful (56)

asthma: a physical condition that makes it difficult for someone to breath (58)

atlas: a book of maps (62)

backfield coach: in charge of the members of a football team stationed behind the linemen (28)

beatniks: young people part of a social group in 1950s-early 60s that rejected the traditional rules of society and encouraged people to express themselves through art (40)

beeper: pager, a small radio receiver that alerts the user to an incoming message (22)

birdie: a score of one under par—the expected number of strokes to complete a hole (48)

Bob Cousy: American professional basketball player, won MVP of Boston Celtics in 1957 (31)

Bulemia: eating disorder; compulsive overeating followed by self-induced vomiting (12)

bureau: a low chest of drawers for use in a bedroom (58)

butler: the main male servant in the home of a wealthy person (53)

charcoal briquets: combo of charcoal and other ingredients molded into easy-to-light lumps (7)

chronic: continuing or occurring again and again for a long time (17)

cogent: very clear and easy for the mind to accept and believe (57)

conspirator: a person who is involved in a secret plan, i.e. a conspiracy (44)

construed: understood per the intention (12)

courses: golf courses (12)

crullers: sweet food made from a piece of dough that has been twisted and fried (36)

darkie: usually offensive; used as an insulting, contemptuous term for a black person (49)

epidemic: affecting a disproportionately large number of individuals in a community (11)

escapades: an exciting, foolish, usually adventurous action (12)

Fanny Farmer: was once the largest candy manufacturer and retailer in the country (49)

five iron: golf club in the mid-iron range used for sizeable approach shots, however 2- 3-

4- and now 5- irons are considered increasingly unnecessary (31)

forlornly: sad and lonely, empty and in poor condition, nearly hopeless (64)

fringe: on the edge; area of activity that is related to but not part of what is central (29)

funnies: phrase for newspaper comic strips (22)

gallery: a large audience or group of spectators at a golf match (13)

geranium: bright red blooms against rich foliage; various meanings: stupidity/folly,

unexpected meeting, true friendship; scarlet geraniums relate to either comfort or stupidity (34)

guard towers: watch tower; structure built as fortification for surveillance, protection (28)

heckler: interrupts a performer by shouting rude or annoying comments or questions (13)

hide nor hair: no sign or indication of someone or something (24)

highballs: group of drinks made of a base spirit and a larger proportion of a non-alcoholic

mixer; Gin & Tonic, Long Island Iced Tea, Rum & Coke, Pimm's Cup, etc. (42)

in full flower: a state of blooming or flourishing (14)

irks: bother or annoy (21)

Jack Nicklaus: "The Golden Bear," wildly regarded as the greatest golfer of all time (57)

landlubber: a person who knows very little about the sea or ships, not a sailor (50)

little bitty: small, tiny (55)

long irons: 2- 3- 4-irons, golf clubs considered most technically difficult to use effectively (47)

loony: crazy or foolish (17)

Loose lips sink ships: phrase propagated during World War II to warn against careless talk concerning secure information that might be of use to the enemy (39)

machinations: a scheming or crafty action or artful design intended to accomplish some usually evil end (57)

mainstream: ideas or activities that are regarded as normal or conventional (12)

marginal: very slight or small, not included in main part of group (17)

memory like a horse: Norman may have gotten the phrase ‘memory like an elephant’ wrong, but horses indeed also have a huge memory capacity, second only to the elephant (29)

my ears are like cats: Norman means he has cat-like hearing; excellent, ultrasonic and above even that of a dog because of their satellite dish shaped ears (45)

neuralgia: a sharp pain that is felt along the length of a nerve (58)

nub: the crux or central point of the matter (33)

nyet: “no” in Russian (39)

pad: living quarters (40)

Panama hat: a tradition brimmed straw hat of Ecuadorian origin, often worn as accessories to summer-weight suits such as those made of linen or silk (58)

picket: protest or strike involving pickets, a stick or post that is pointed at the end so that it can be put into the ground (54)

planet Xenon: a destructive twin of Superman’s home planet Krypton (39)

pulp: soft, wet substance that is left after something has been squeezed or crushed (35)

retarded: slow or limited in intellectual/emotional development, academic progress (17)

rocker: rocking chair (28)

rote: mechanical or unthinking routine or repetition, a joyless sense of order (48)

schizophrenic: one suffering from schizophrenia, a psychotic disorder in which someone cannot think or behave normally and often experiences delusions; contradictory qualities or attitudes by disintegration of personality (17)

scratch player: a golfer who can play to a handicap of zero on all rated courses (48)

scuffed: scuff, a mark or a scratch in the surface of something made by scraping it (26)

sheltered workshop: a supervised organization, environment or workplace that employs adults with physical and/or mental disabilities; facilities that employ people with disabilities exclusively or primarily (43)

Skinny Minnie: 1958 song by Bill Haley and His Comets; exceptionally thin woman (17)

smother: to kill someone by covering the face so that breathing is not possible (19)

Snoopy: Charlie Brown's pet beagle in the comic strip *Peanuts* by Charles Schultz (22)

sordid: very bad or dishonest, dirty, marked by baseness or grossness (21)

sow: a fully grown female pig (49)

sterilized: to make someone or some animal unable to produce children (44)

sties: pigpen, a dirty slovenly place (47)

swoon: to become enraptured with joy, a state of bewilderment or ecstasy (56)

Ted Williams: "The Kid"/"The Splendid Splinter," professional baseball player and manager, seventeen-time all-star, regarded as one of the greatest hitters in baseball history (47)

thick rough: thick grass that makes it hard to see and hit a golf ball (12)

tic: a small repeated movement of a muscle that cannot be controlled (27)

tomes: a very large, thick book (35)

tourniquet: a bandage or strip of cloth that is tied tightly around an injured arm or leg to stop the bleeding from a wound (36)

traps: sand traps, a depression near the green on a golf course filled with sand (12)

tuckered out: exhausted (64)

venom: poison produced by an animal and used to kill or injure another animal through biting or stinging, a very strong feeling of anger or hatred (21)

ward: section in a hospital for patients needing a particular kind of care (43)

weather radio: public broadcast dedicated to airing continuous weather reports (12)

Wheaties: brand of General Mills breakfast cereal, iconic for featuring prominent athletes on the exterior of the package with the slogan “The Breakfast of Champions” (7)

wicked: Boston/New England slang for really, very, ‘hella’ (27)

wooden nickels: do not be scammed or tricked, be alert and aware of shady people (57)

Xavier Cugat: Spanish-American bandleader best known for his ‘percolating dance numbers that swept the country like tropical fever during the 1930s and 40s,’ his band was *Cugat and The Gigolos*, led resident orchestra at Waldorf-Astoria (26)

yips, the: loss of fine motor skills in athletes, manifesting as twitches, staggers, jitters, jerks (30)

Geographical References and Place Names

“*Place*: New England” (4). (see fig. 1)

ARNOLD. "I live here at the Stonehenge Villa apartment complex in a group apartment with three other guys" (7).

ARNOLD. "Today I went to the market at the end of the street" (7).

JACK. "Livingston's Market" (14).

JACK. "At the doughnut shop where Norman works . . ." (12).

JACK. ". . . on a recent group trip to a local petting zoo . . ." (12).

ARNOLD. "Maybe I'll just move to Russia, I repeat, to Russia" (16). (see fig. 2)

JACK. ". . . Mrs. Fremus, the deaf widow three apartments down" (17).

JACK. "Sometimes I eat lunch here down by the railroad tracks" (21).

JACK. "Throw on your dancing clothes and we'll drive over to the Center" (25).

MRS. FREMUS. "When we first moved here, Barney said he loved this view more than anything. The way the guard towers stick up over the trees . . . Barney's sister used to say she'd never live anywhere near a prison . . ." (28).

BARRY. "My Dad . . . he was pretty busy with his career. So when he brought me out to the Institutions, he couldn't stay around too long. He kind of waved" (42).

SHEILA. "I picked them in that lot near the Getty station. You know that lot" (53)?

JACK. "I'll still be working in the neighborhood. You know, that building with the big red awning on the way to the Center" (62)?

TRAIN ANNOUNCEMENT. "On track number one through the West subway: The Colonial. Stopping at Kingston, Westerly, New London, Old Saybrook, New Haven, Bridgeport, Stamford, Rye, Penn Station, New York. With continuing service to Washington D.C." (64).

TRAIN ANNOUNCEMENT. “Now boarding on track number seven: Local service.

Stopping at Boston, Montreal, Vancouver, Anchorage, Vladivostok, Irkutsk,

Petropavlosk, Klemovischi, and Moscow. All aboard” (66)!

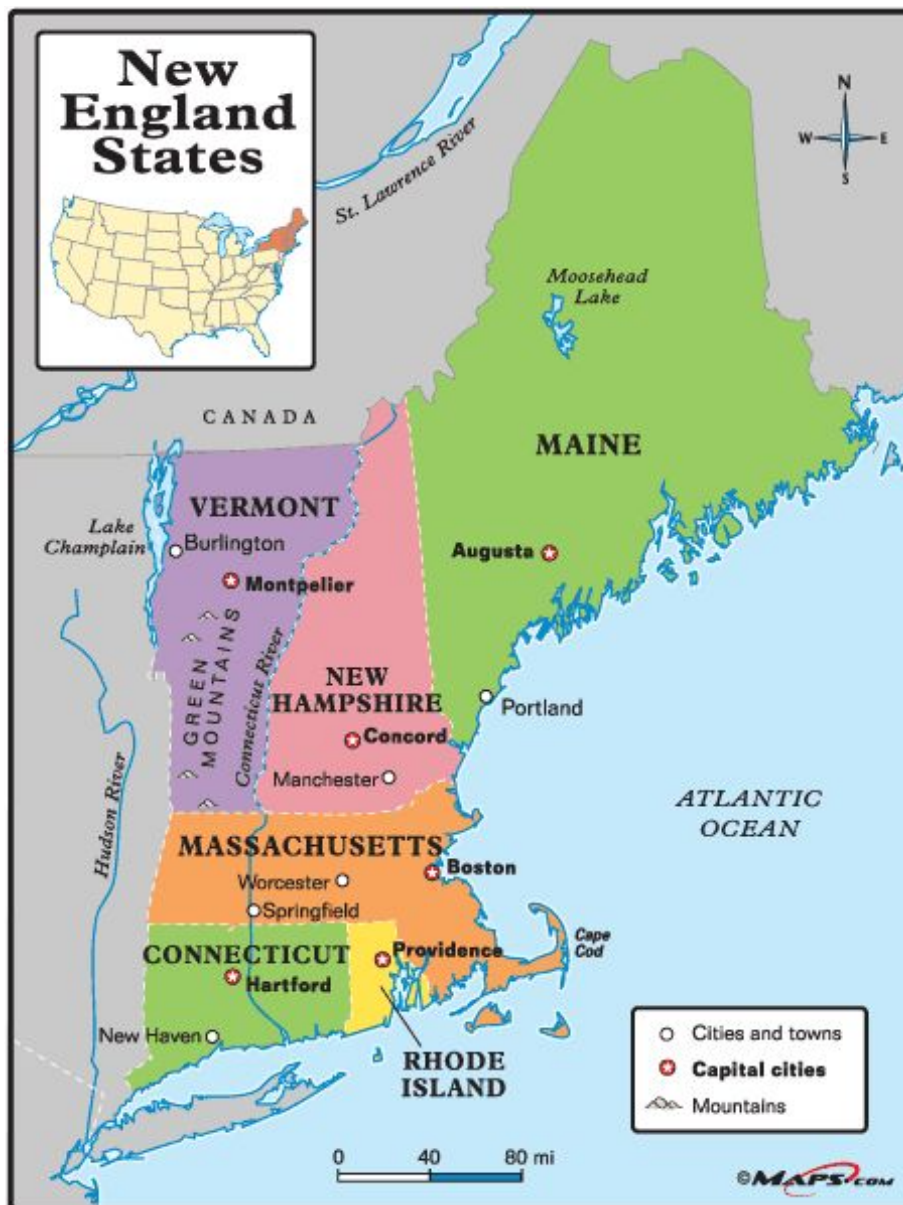


Fig. 1. Map of New England States. *Pinterest*, Maps.com, s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/564x/a6/e2/5d/a6e25d365868c83909a09e89924062d1.jpg. Accessed 20 November 2016.

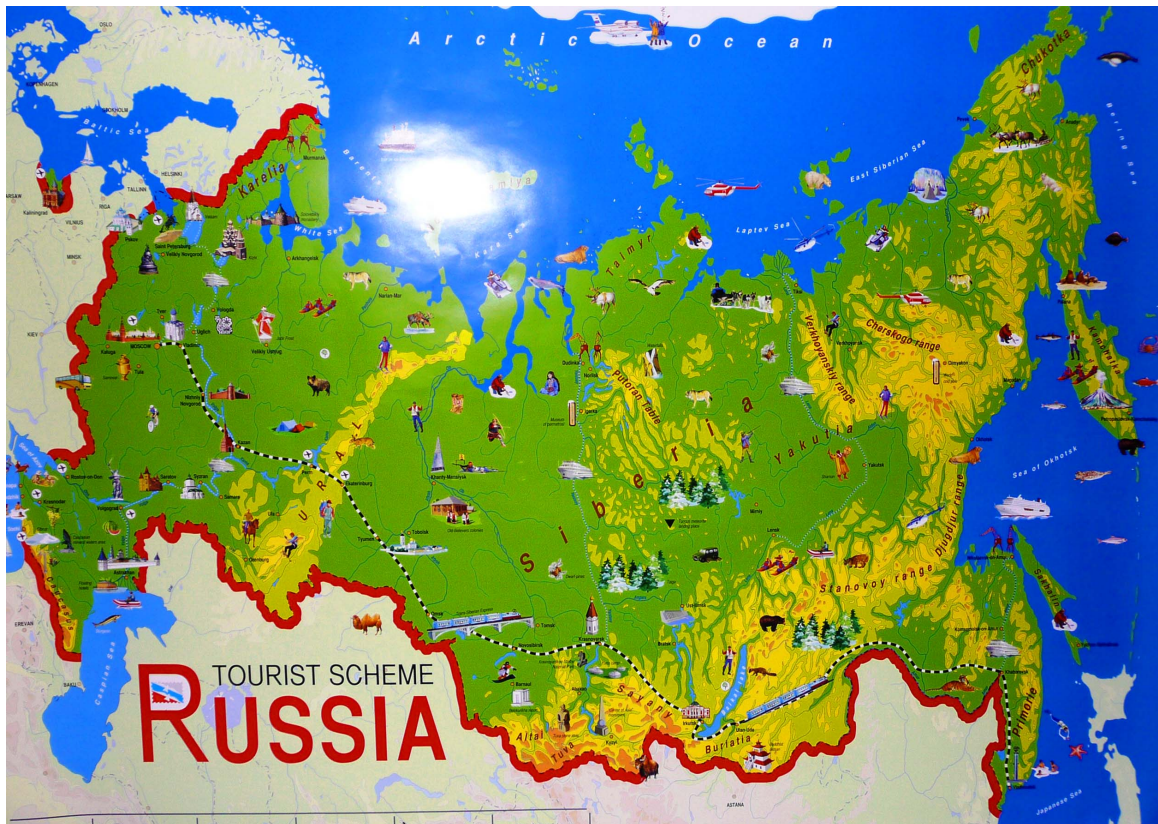


Fig. 2. Map of Russia. ChaOs, “Russia Tourist Map; Largest Most Details Map and Flag of Russia.” *Travel Around the World—Vacation Reviews*, Blog, 28 July 2012, www.mytripolog.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Russia-Tourist-Map.jpg. Accessed 20 November 2016.

Pronunciations

Bulemia: boo LEE me uh

schizophrenic: skit suh FREH nick

DeFarge: di FARjz

Xavier Cugat: ZAY vee yer KOO gaht

Bob Cousy: BAHB KOO see

nyet: nnYET

Jack Nicklaus: JAK NI klows

neuralgia: ner AL dja (not AH)

Literary Allusions

JACK. “She knits. He talks. I call it Madame DeFarge and The Golf Pro” (17). This quote is a reference to the notorious villain in Charles Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities* who knits with evil intentions, stitching the names of her intended victims into her patterns á la the Fates in ancient Greek mythology.

JACK. “So where are the other two Musketeers” (36)? This is a reference to Alexander Dumas’ novel *The Three Musketeers* in which an eager new recruit attempts to join the elite corps in Paris known as Musketeers of the Guard, only to meet and train with three of the most formidable members: Athos, Porthos and Aramis.

SHEILA. “She ate a picture of God one day. God and His friends eating” (54). This quote is a reference to Leonardo DaVinci’s *The Last Supper* depicting Jesus and his disciples at a Passover meal.

References to the Natural World of the Play

“*Time*: The present. Summer” (4).

“A modest two bedroom apartment in a . . . complex. The area is suburban” (4).

ARNOLD. “It’s a real beautiful day, Jack isn’t it? . . . Not too many clouds in the sky today” (10).

JACK. “It’s early afternoon, Norman” (11).

ARNOLD. “Because I clean up after the matinee, mostly I just see the ends of movies . . . It’s not a bad job. My boss, Mr. Corbin, says I’m doing real good” (25).

JACK. “When I got home at three A.M., I threw a toaster across the kitchen” (26).

BARRY. “It’s a pretty moon tonight” (28).

JACK. "Every Wednesday, we have dances here at the Center. Most of the residents come. They drink punch and eat potato chips and pop balloons and hide in the bathroom and, sooner or later, dance. Some . . . just sit on the fringe and watch" (29).

SHEILA. "I got to leave at nine. The bus comes then" (53).

References to the Social World

NORMAN. "The bus sure was crowded. Oh boy, I had to sit up front with old people.

You get a real good look out of the windows if you sit with the old people" (11).

JACK. "I've told you over and over not to buy stuff at Livingston's Market. I've told you they take advantage of you" (14).

JACK. "Didn't she say you were too fat" (16)?

BARRY. "When Harry comes with the van, he'll be pissed if you aren't ready" (22).

ARNOLD. "He says I'll have to polish his shoes every day or he'll beat me up" (25).

ARNOLD. ". . . 'Excuse me, can I cut in?' Jack says we can cut in if we want to" (17).

References to the Political World

NORMAN. "The bus sure was crowded. Oh boy, I had to sit up front with old people.

ARNOLD. "This is like Russia around here. Boy, a guy can't even eat a doughnut or get a few things in for a rainy day. Boy" (16)!

JACK. "Three months ago, Lucien was informed by the Social Security Administration that his benefits were being cut off . . . We appealed. No luck. Our next step is to appear before a State Senate subcommittee" (21).

JACK. “When I found out about Barry’s father coming, I went to my boss and asked him to stop it. He agreed. His boss, however, said we shouldn’t interfere. He’d met Barry, he said. Barry was stable” (57).

References to the Cultural World

BARRY. “The pros always have a crowd. Always a gallery. Aspire, Mr. Hodges, aspire to be a champion” (13).

ARNOLD. “You can’t bury him in the sandbox, Lucien. The kids play in the sandbox. You can’t bury rats where kids play” (19).

ARNOLD. “And don’t swear Jack. It’s not polite” (33).

BARRY. “My Dad, you know, when Mom died, he was pretty busy with his career. So when he brought me out to the Institutions, he couldn’t stay around too long. He kind of waved” (42).

MR. KLEMPER. “Of course, me, I couldn’t ever relax living so close to a prison” (48).

MR. KLEMPER. “They get sassy with me, I get sassy right back. They think, a one-armed man, he won’t be sassy. Well bullshit to that” (49).

References to the Ideological World

JACK. “At the end of the shift, they gather all the broken doughnuts and give them to Norman. This is construed as an act of kindness by both Norman and the people at the doughnut shop” (12).

JACK. “. . . ‘They’ll never not need me any more,’ I told her . . . ‘Who made that rule?’ she asked. ‘God,’ I said” (21).

JACK. “I’ve been coming to these dances for months now and I can never decide if it’s the saddest place I’ve ever been. Or the happiest” (30).

JACK. “I need a new job. They deserve better. Or I deserve better. Or somebody deserves something” (33).

NORMAN. “I don’t talk to people who don’t do dishes” (40).

BARRY. “Some people don’t have manners, but I’m not one of them” (48).

MR. KLEMPER. “Buses don’t wait for a one-armed man. That’s one thing I’ve learned in life, Barry. Buses don’t wait for a one-armed man” (50).

LUCIEN. “I am retarded. I am damaged . . . But I will not go away. And I will not whither because the cage is too small. I am here to remind the species of the species” (52).

JACK. “You see, the problem is that they never change. I change, my life changes, my crises change. But they stay the same” (57).

The Author and His World

The author of *The Boys Next Door* created a penetrating piece of impactful, heartwarming, thought-provoking theatre that continues to be one of the most prolifically produced plays since its debut twenty years ago, but the playwright himself is completely—and refreshingly—elusive. This play debuted in 1986, which was well before commonplace use of the Internet, let alone the currently addictive double-edged sword of self-promotion. Though *The Boys Next Door* made Tom Griffin’s career and continues to generate production after production, there remains very little in terms of a digital footprint for this undeniably successful playwright. Not being able to find a single photo of someone nowadays is baffling and, honestly, impressive. And yet, how refreshing that such a script, a story, and the magnetism of the characters he has created are not hurting in popularity due to the lack of the author’s online presence. Having

turned age seventy by the time this is written, and still being based in Rhode Island with his wife and cat, perhaps he is merely content with a simpler life—just like the boys in his show.

Born in 1946 on Valentine's Day in Providence, Rhode Island, Tom Griffin was delivered into a post-war world following the end of World War II in 1945. Growing up in the 1950s to early 1960s for any child would have been more formative than normal because the nation itself was reforming—including the landscape of disability. Not much can be found regarding his childhood, but there are two moments from his young life he has mentioned in public forums. On three separate interviews, Griffin recalls a lesson that his father instilled in him about the mentally disabled children in his neighborhood: "I grew up in a neighborhood with a lot of retarded people. My father had an attitude—you could feel sorry for them, you could make fun of them, but you couldn't exclude them" (Warren). When Griffin played touch football, he and his companions "didn't pass the ball to them, but they were still in the game" (Londré 115). Though the idea of making fun of them is now an outdated sentiment, Griffin recalls: "My father used to say, 'You can play with them, get mad at them—but you cannot exclude them. That's the most damaging thing you can do to anyone'" (Arkatov).

In another interview, Griffin made this conclusion regarding his pointed memory: "That's really the worst thing, being told you can't play" (Warren). That permission of sorts to laugh with and even *at* the mentally disabled persons he encountered is evident throughout *The Boys Next Door*. Jack is merciless about pointing out how ridiculous each character's behavior is at any given time, but it reeks only of exasperation, never of disrespect. This playful approach embodied by the able-bodied characters in the show is

not politically correct, but maybe that is why this play has been “strangely indestructible” (Warren) for twenty years: the audience has an *in*; they can recognize that feeling of being amused but not knowing quite what they are allowed to do with it. The text of Griffin’s play, then, echoes his father’s invitation: to both feel how you feel in an interaction with an extraordinary person, but not to forget that your main job is to witness it with grace and include them in your world—even if you are only doing so from a seat in a theatre.

The other interaction that grants an insight into Griffin’s early talent is from a former classmate at the University of Rhode Island. In her junior year, Nancy Verde Barr took a creative writing class. She recalls, “One by one we had to read essays we wrote. When the boy sitting next to me read his, I had an epiphany, and not a good one. *He’s a writer*, I said to myself.” That boy was Tom Griffin. His college essay was apparently so impressive that it melted another’s aspirations of writing, rendering them helpless to think they would ever have as much to say by comparison—a harmless though promising start. Griffin was graduated in 1968 and became a professional actor for thirteen years as a full-time member of the renowned Trinity Repertory Company, appearing in more than twenty-five productions and clocking an estimated ten thousand hours on stage (Warren).

The first play Griffin wrote was a one-act called *Will the Gentleman in Cabin Six Please Rise to the Occasion* in 1968, and he followed with his first full-length piece, *Workers*, in 1975. Presumably, this was encouraging enough to lead him to compose his first arguably relevant play, *The Taking Away of Little Willie* in 1979, which also dealt with issues of disability. In 1981, he enjoyed some steady success with *Einstein and the Polar Bear*, which was considered popular before *The Boys Next Door* came along as a

welcomed eclipse. Then two other plays snuck in: a soft premiere of *Amateurs* in 1984 (to be given a full mounting in 1991) and another called *Pasta* as a remounted production in April 1986 after its first staging in 1982. So, amidst this admirable momentum, the world premiere of *The Boys Next Door* debuted regionally at the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, New Jersey, on June 12, 1986, to a slated three-week run. The show moved Off-Broadway to the Lamb's Theatre, directed by Josephine R. Abady, the artistic director of the Berkshire Theatre Festival at the time. It opened on November 23, 1987, enjoyed a run of sixteen previews and one hundred sixty-eight performances, and the rest is an impressive history—including over 3,500 productions to date in the United States, Canada, and abroad in at least eight international countries. There was also a film adaptation by the Hallmark Hall of Fame in 1996.

The author originally thought he was writing a “small play” (Arkatov), but must have been pleasantly surprised at its effectiveness on a grand scale. The idea for this piece evolved through conversations with a friend of his who worked as an administrator at a group home similar to what the boys live in. “He used to tell me stories—some of them devastating, many of them hilarious,” says Griffin. “Of course, a lot of this play is invented. I did what all writers do: Start with a story someone tells you—and when you finish, it’s unrecognizable” (Arkatov). In 1989, *The Boys Next Door* was the most-produced play in America, but in a 1993 interview, Griffin was still rather sweetly at a loss to explain why. “If you ask me what the message [of the play] is, I haven’t a clue,” he insisted. A few years earlier in a 1989 interview, he stated a tad more articulately: “I think the reason for its appeal is that it’s propelled by humor, not maudlin stuff.” Disability is so often portrayed as a poor, lamentable state—or worse, as a sidekick to the

“real” action—but *The Boys Next Door* is anything but sappy or about marginalization. The jovial quality of the play that consistently succeeds over the daily mishaps and even heartbreaks of these characters is refreshing, and that is what ultimately leaves the audience more affected than they expect to be. “Also, a lot of plays and TV and movies aren't *about* something. This is,” says Griffin—even if he himself cannot quite articulate what that particular “is” is.

There are two more items of note to point out regarding the author's relation to his own text. His time as an actor certainly influenced his playwriting. “I don't write tiny roles because I played some of those”—which not only explains the clever use of two actors being responsible for multiple one-scene roles (male and female respectively), but also sheds light on why he included a specific note in the script that “neither Sheila nor Mr. Klemper should ever be double-cast” (Griffin). Actors can feel marginalized in their own right per any production's casting results, so it is admirable (and abnormal) that his character divisions are thoughtful and intentional, generously serving both the performers and the story. No doubt that this equal division of roles is a compelling factor in its regional success. In reference to his personal retreat from performance, Griffin mused, “I discovered that I loved rehearsal, but performing was a drudgery. Acting is hard work. . . I just didn't have the gold-ring mentality [as an actor].” Many in the entertainment business have made a similar discovery that shifts their professional identity towards that of, for example, a teaching artist rather than solely a performer. One of that community could easily recognize how courageous Griffin's confession is. So often, such a transition can be perceived as a failure instead of a victory. Griffin's model shows that success can be found in a different place than where one originally ventured as an artist.

The other notable detail, however, is an ironic *disconnect* between the playwright and his text regarding a key element of his characters: their disabilities. In describing the boys, Griffin explains, “One of the men is quite retarded. One is marginally retarded. One is a schizophrenic who doesn’t belong there. And one is retarded, overweight, and in love” (Arkotov). Griffin never identifies three of the boys’ afflictions in specific clinical terms. Maybe he intended to leave it up to each production, but that seems unlikely since he has taken great care with other staging notes to preempt any potential discrepancy in his vision. The more likely scenario is that, quite simply, there were no other terms to use. A study guide by the Syracuse Stage suggests that in the 1980s (when *The Boys Next Door* came out) the term retarded was an umbrella clinical term used to describe anyone with mental disabilities. Only since then has the word taken on a generalized, derogatory meaning. It is no surprise that another factor in this play’s popularity was the current social climate of the time, which, alongside the challenging of social exclusion within the civil rights movement, was ripe for a parallel frontier: the battle for disability rights. The 1960s brought with it a new era of non-discrimination legislation and thereby ushered in a “new consciousness around disability—[from] personal tragedy to social model, from person trouble to public issue” (Shah and Priestly 8).

In 1963, President John F. Kennedy called for a reduction “over a number of years and by hundreds of thousands, [in the number] of persons confined” to residential institutions and asked that methods be found “to retain in and return to the community the mentally ill and mentally retarded, and thereto restore and revitalize their lives through better health programs and strengthened educational and rehabilitation services.” This resulted in deinstitutionalization and increased community services. (Timeline)

In 1986, the Special Olympics were founded. In 1976, the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons,

reinforcing the increase of public awareness and encouragement of inclusion inside and outside the disabled community. In 1978, the National Council on Disability (NCD) was established as a federal advisory council in the U.S. Department of Education, and in 1990, “after decades of campaigning and lobbying,” the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed—“the most sweeping disability rights legislation in American history” —to nationally protect individuals with an unprecedented range of mental and physical medical conditions against discrimination (Timeline). *The Boys Next Door* was not a piece of political agenda, but its topical subject matter obviously thrived within the discussion of the times.

Griffin wrote two more plays: *Amateurs* in 1991 and *Mrs. Sedgewick’s Head* in 1993, neither of which enjoyed the success of *The Boys Next Door*. One source claimed that *The Boys Next Door* had been produced on Broadway, Off-Broadway, Off-Off-Broadway, in London’s West End, and internationally in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia in cities such as Paris, Tokyo, Oslo, Berlin, Tel Aviv, Vienna, Sydney, and Johannesburg. Griffin is also touted as the recipient of multiple honors: the CBS/Dramatists’ Guild Award (for *Amateurs*), an L.A. Drama Critics’ nomination (for *The Taking Away of Little Willie*), a National Endowment for the Arts grant, a *Playboy* Editorial Award, and an O’Neill playwriting fellowship. There is even an estimate that Griffin has written sixteen screenplays. However, an article in *Variety* about his final play sheds the clearest light on why, despite all of his accomplishments, he has not written anything since. The review has an air of exasperation about it, using phrases like “wildly overwritten” and “clumsy construction,” providing a clue that perhaps Griffin had finally used his nine lives as a writer—at least in Hollywood’s eyes.

Griffin's latest play, his sub-Sam Shepard "Mrs. Sedgewick's Head," will not repeat its predecessor's remarkable success. This is Griffin's Hollywood play, his written reaction to the love-hate relationship virtually every writer who becomes involved with movies evinces. Following Griffin's creation of some half-dozen film scripts for MGM, Pathé Entertainment, Warner Bros. and Ted Turner, it emerges less as a piece of theater than as a grab bag of miscellaneous movie scenes. It's self-consciously smart-ass and never seems to know where its focal point is. If "Mrs. Sedgewick's Head" is Griffin's attempt at revenge on Hollywood, Hollywood has the last laugh. (Taylor)

It is a difficult and clichéd blow for a writer to do well in their original medium of theatre, be thrust into the entirely different beast of film, and then, in essence, end in a whimper because they could not make the most of their shot at the big time. But in Griffin's own words, his biggest hit was intended to be a *small* story. Hollywood was not for him, which is likely why it is so difficult to find much information on him today. He already left the spotlight a long time ago for the other side of the stage. And nearly four thousand productions and counting are thankful for that.

World of the Play

Connections

I have always had a heart for the underdog—from the shy student in the cafeteria eating lunch alone to a co-worker being laughed at for stumbling behavior she could not control. It would be hyperbolic to say that I have a bleeding heart in general, but the sentiment of inclusion, understanding, and patience that emanates from *The Boys Next Door* affects me deeply and spurs me to action. Empathy exists in everyone, but its potential for true impact must be consciously mined and acutely tuned as would any learned skill. Certain personalities—or in this case, limitations—require some specialized effort, even for those who possess a natural capacity for care. Theatre itself as an art form is a highly human; its instruments of expression are, after all, human beings. In this

imaginary laboratory of how people relate, how they listen, how they resolve (or how they *could* resolve) their differences, we as an audience are shown a new way to behave. That was my wish for this production of *The Boys Next Door*: that the northern Michigan community I shared it with would introduced to a lovely group of people and, within a safe atmosphere, would be able to observe and engage with both the characters onstage and their own previously-drawn conclusions about the range and richness of individuals with mental and physical disabilities.

My cousin is a Special Education teacher in Northern Michigan and the stories she shares about her students are fascinating—not only regarding the shenanigans they inevitably fall into on a weekly if not daily basis, but also in regards to the activities she challenges them to do. Her most-repeated phrase seems to be, “You do it. I know you can. Just try!” I see her using these empowering techniques with her own children as well. She is an incredibly loving and tender mother, but she makes it a point to never *baby* her babies or her students. The exposure to these shared experiences, along with my own exploration of what I could offer society through theatre, is what led me at one time to consider the profession of drama therapy.

While living in Los Angeles from 2009-2015, I sought out a drama therapist to interview and shadow. I was able to volunteer as a teaching aid in one of her acting classes at the Down Syndrome Association of Orange County, which is where I first interacted with a group of mentally handicapped individuals for an extended amount of time. As I mentioned, I had always had a heart for people who are not easily understood, and was even complimented on having an innate ability to connect with persons of their communication level. Still, this was the first time that I was actually able to intimately

observe and interact with how their minds worked—to finally decipher which portions of their lives were *inhibited* and which were *enhanced* due to their unique differences. They all had distinct and diverse personalities. They had shticks to knowingly bug the teacher. They had boyfriends and girlfriends. They had BFFs. They had frustrations about their parents. They had deep feelings about their dog that had just died. They had homework. They had dreams. They had future plans. Some even had talent agents. Before this experience, I knew objectively that people with disabilities had full lives, but I admitted at the time (with apt embarrassment) that I was genuinely surprised to see the impressively rich extent of their capabilities. My personal and professional study as a theatre artist had been in human empathy, compassion, and consciousness, yet even I had this large lesson to learn.

Other than a few experiences with individuals in school and community theatre, I have no personal connection per se within the disabled world. I do not have a relative or a friend's relative or even a childhood acquaintance that was mentally disabled. However, the recently growing awareness of Autism has generated a glib but nevertheless intriguing phrase: "We're all on the spectrum." This notion has ignited a heated scientific and social debate, but I contest that its factual basis is fundamentally irrelevant. Whether or not every human being is on the autism spectrum specifically, we are all on the socially awkward spectrum. I see it every day at work, in stores, and at events: attempts at connection and failings at even the smallest of small talk. It is comical but it is constant. Actors are perceived as people who always want the spotlight. Personally, I merely crave the relief that comes with being scripted. Who would not relish having a perfect text at your fingertips, allowing oneself the envied and ever-attempted state of

being witty, compelling, and hyper-articulate? I keep going back to one line of Jack's in *The Boys Next Door*: "I've been coming to these dances for months now and I can never decide if it's the saddest place I've ever been. Or the happiest" (30). That question is what paralyzes non-disabled persons when they encounter the disabled, and that is the question that I wanted to explore through my production: are these persons disabled or does the impairment lay in society's view of the disabled?

An equally large affinity I had for this show was in its expertly-crafted humor—assuring both audience and cast members that the laughter is not *at* anyone but always *with* these characters that no one can help but fall in love with. And so, armed with an arsenal of respectful exposure, *The Boys Next Door* continues to be a complex, layered, well-intentioned, and potentially progressive piece to dive into.

Relevance

This play relates to a wide majority of audiences. First and foremost, it is a brilliant comedy. There is a lot of heart, but there is also an undeniable abundance of belly laughs in classic forms: slapstick, wordplay, physical comedy, extreme hysterics, misdirection, etc. Due to its episodic structure, the action almost plays like a vaudeville. Through a string of vignettes with this particular breed of lovable clowns, the audience leaves with a warm smile and just enough of a message to chew on. The select use of mature language in the script must be forewarned, but should in no way prohibit children of reasonable maturity to attend; one could say has a PG-13 rating.

From an acting perspective, the material is extremely rich—as evidenced by the talent level that was secured for the 1996 film: Nathan Lane, Michael Jeter, Robert Sean Leonard and Courtney B. Vance (2016 Emmy-winner for *The People vs. O.J. Simpson*).

The dialogue writes itself, as they say, and needs only be presented clearly amidst the various crests of heightened stage action to be successful. The question of age-range is a large one, however, and remains unanswered as to whether there is a correct answer to be had at all. On one hand, this is an incredible opportunity for serious high school students to take on such a hefty and sophisticated task at a crucial time in their earliest training. On the other hand, high schoolers may not possess the maturity to sink into the complexity required to accurately and sensitively inhabit these individuals, even if they desire to. But to take the point even further, would adult performers necessarily have the complexity just because they have the added years? Perhaps it is not a question of age but of training level since encountering this work will change both audiences and performers.

In a societal context, this initial dramaturgical exploration was prepared just weeks after the 2016 election of Donald Trump over Hilary Clinton. The country grew severely divided, and has continued to plummet into this divisive pattern of strident separation every four years. Whether in full-gloat or hysterical despair, the individuals affected by this outcome are still clinging to their corners and are the worse for it. The rampant amount of bullying from *both* sides has been deeply disappointing and it is a choice time to remind the country and the globe that there is no “other.” Everyone is different and, therefore, everyone is the same. All one. And if the quaint, vulnerable, fighting spirit of *The Boys Next Door* cannot remind the viewer of this core truth of humanity, then nothing will. Now more than ever, America needs this parabolic tale of these poignant men and their crucial dose of perspective.

Updating

The Boys Next Door is set in the 1980s because of when it was written, but nothing in the text or the action requires that it be kept in that environment. As mentioned elsewhere in this preparation, certain words, like retarded, now take on a different meaning in the current day and age, but perhaps that will serve as a device of sorts—a clinical shock to remind the audience how these individuals used to be regarded. This play garners permission, then, to be both contemporary and dated at the same time. Jack describes the boys’ perpetual existence thusly: “You see, the problem is that they never change. I change, my life changes, my crises change. But they stay the same” (57), signaling that the director must choose a setting carefully and without any help from the boys themselves.

Exploring how each character never changes is valuable. By playing with the idea of precisely where in time they are stuck as individuals, it can effectively be used to illustrate or compliment the age that they have been allotted per their mental capability. Lucien and his Spiderman tie are likely in a loop of 1980s Saturday morning cartoons. Norman and his enthusiastic and therefore admirable dance moves coupled with his groovy bowling t-shirt could be jiving to a constant 1970s disco soundtrack. Arnold’s endearing delusions in particular inspire a nostalgic trail into an unforgiving swirl of Judy Garland songs—specifically the song “In Between”:

That's what I am and in between
It's just like small pox quarantine
I can't do this, I can't go there
I'm just a circle in a square
I don't fit in anywhere . . .
I'm not a child or children bore me
I'm not grown up, grown ups ignore me

And in every sense I'm just on a fence
I'm just an in between (Garland)

Arnold is a control freak that is never in control. He is further isolated by the fact that he is the only one of his acquaintances that suffers from his OCD brand of a drastic need.

This song speaks not only to Arnold's feeling of being alone amidst the boys, but of all of them feeling excluded, or not like the other, by the standards of society. The boys exist in a medically categorized Neverland where they will never be capable of growing up, and the audience is then challenged with the question of whether they are the worse or better for it. One wonders, just as J.M. Barrie posed in *Peter Pan*, whether the Lost Boys are truly happier without the real world. Are they secretly pining for more of a life or are they only pining once they were made aware of something to pine for? Did a mother figure dropping in and illuminating the vacancies of their reality in fact save them or ruin them? Modifying Jack's pontification slightly: Is Neverland the happiest place to be or the saddest?

Production History

The original title of *The Boys Next Door* was *Damaged Hearts, Broken Flowers*. If that title had been allowed to persist, it would have spelled theatrical doom for this heart-warming and heart-warning story. Such downtrodden, victim-like language completely betrays its playful spirit and may not have enjoyed success over the past twenty years. The revised title, however, retains the sparkling invitation this play offers to disabled and able-bodied audiences alike and was a consequential improvement.

The Boys Next Door launched its world premiere regionally in Princeton, New Jersey, on June 12, 1986, at the McCarter Theatre. The run was slated to end on June 29, and there is no evidence to the contrary that the production went past the three weeks it

was originally granted. Two reviews in the *New York Times* are available from that time, and each critic commented quite differently on this new piece of theatre. The first, D.J.R. Bruckner on June 18, asserted his assessment that the spliced format of the action made it feel choppy and that the charmed enjoyment felt by the audience proved its sentimental value but not much more, as if the “playwright mistrusts his ability to develop characters and a clear line of action.” In fact, Bruckner’s only excessively positive remarks were in regards to the recent renovation of the theatre itself; his complimentary comments of the evening were of the comfort brought about by new, cushy seats. Bruckner gushed slightly over the “breakout moments” of the disabled becoming able-bodied, but the magic of the rest of the play was lost on him.

On the other hand, the second reviewer, Alvin Klein on June 22, acknowledged and even reveled in the masterful balance that the playwright had achieved between creative use and celebration of the boys’ unique existences:

During the first act of “The Boys Next Door,” the audience can be heard laughing almost continually. In a casual comedy, those sounds ought to be welcomed, not wondered about. But wonder one must, for the new play . . . is all about the mentally handicapped. Is that a laughing matter? . . . One wants to look away, but cannot. With all that, do not forget that the laughter in Mr. Griffin's play also comes out of what is genuinely funny, and that is part of the point. . . . Suddenly, it becomes all too clear that the boys next door—yes, they may indeed be next door, or even closer than that—are not being exploited. Whatever the motive for all those laughs, they are not cheap or condescending. Lucien and Norman and Barry and Arnold are not being patronized; they are being acknowledged. (Klein)

The only qualms Klein cites are with the “prosaic and over-written” speeches that Jack delivers directly to the audience as a bridge between scenes, calling them “the most-contrived, calculated, and carelessly constructed moments in the play.” It is of interest that his discomfort (in contrast with the first reviewer’s) came with the able-bodied character instead of the disabled ones.

Originally directed by Nagel Jackson, the artistic director at the McCarter Theatre from 1979–1990, *The Boys Next Door* was picked up by a new artistic director for its next run: Josephine Abady of the Berkshire Theatre Festival. She is also credited as the director of the culminating Off-Broadway production, so one may surmise that Abady decided to bring the piece to participate in her own season first then incubate it for a larger production from there. The eventual *Playbill* header read, “A Play from the Berkshire Theatre Festival,” so whether the Festival merely provided funding for its New York debut or if there was an actual buffer production mounted within the Festival in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, before moving to Manhattan is unclear. What is clear, however, is that *The Boys Next Door* opened at the Lamb’s Theatre on November 23, 1987, and enjoyed sixteen previews followed by a healthy run of one hundred and sixty-eight performances. Even the renowned artist Al Hirschfeld penned a cartoon of the donut-loving character Norman with his sweets-filled belly and cherished ring of keys (see fig. 22), so it must have made its mark. A glowing *New York Times* review by Mel Gussow successfully set the pace for the escalating momentum that Griffin’s accessible fable was destined to have:

Neither he nor his cast patronizes the characters but treats them equitably and with respect. At the same time, the play does not belabor its own instructiveness. Sporadically, the social worker briefs the audience on the background of the events we are watching, but the playwright remains intent on entertaining rather than preaching, and, in so doing, offers us a lesson. (Gussow)

Abady’s direction secured *The Boys Next Door* as “a sweet-tempered comedy of social concern” that invited the public to think without forcing them to take a stance. Within a controlled, thoughtful, and surprisingly joyous environment, audiences got to meet individuals that, in all likelihood, did *indeed* live next door to them in a hilarious and

touching presentation. They were skillfully reminded that people with disabilities are not broken—that they can “feel, judge, dream, and love just as well as any person without a disability” (Ginn).

Most reviews cannot help mentioning the fantasy sequences of the show, when three of the characters at select times suddenly find themselves with full abilities and physicalize their individual moment of wish fulfillment accordingly. This performance convention had been seen before in *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*, a production that dealt with two parents’ challenges of raising a daughter with cerebral palsy. It premiered in Scotland, opened in London’s West End, transferred to Broadway the next year, received four Tony Award nominations and one win, and was first revived on Broadway in 1985 (just before *The Boys Next Door*). Another popular piece at the time that dealt with disability was *Children of a Lesser God*, which focused on the conflicting feelings between a deaf student and her teacher—portrayed by a deaf actress in both the play in 1979 and the film in 1986. It is apparent that the climate for the discussion of disability was ripe and current when Griffin wrote *The Boys Next Door*, and that the theatrical conventions of the 1980s in general were right in line with the aesthetic he employed in his play.

After the sweeping sentimentality of the 1940s that America craved following the war—as evidenced in the prolific and poetic works of Rodgers & Hammerstein, Tennessee Williams, Eugene O’Neill, etc.—an era known as Theatre of the Absurd snuck in to challenge audiences back into direct engagement and lively dialogue. Playwrights like Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard, Peter Brook, even Steven Sondheim began a revolution of introducing just enough of “the

other” to the stage in order to allow us to laugh at ourselves and engage with our unique intricacies. Elements such as deconstruction and direct audience address were used frequently around Griffin’s time in such examples as *A Chorus Line* (1975), *Amadeus* (1980) and *Into the Woods* (1987). Twentieth-century theatre is generally a more naturalistic and realistic type of drama, but this delicious crop of authors persisted to push theatre’s boundaries into the realm of the self-referential, irreverent, and slightly bizarre while still remaining palatable.

By 1989, *The Boys Next Door* was the most-produced play in America, and, as of this date, over 3,500 productions have been mounted spanning the United States and the world in Australia, Europe, Canada, South Africa, and more. Little physical evidence can be found of the original production save the *Playbills* from the McCarter Theatre and Lamb’s Theatre and few, furiously-mined black and white production photos (see figs. 25, 26). However, as one can imagine, there are copious amounts of reviews, pictures, profiles, and interviews available since then due to the frequency of performance and the current environment of heightened digital facility. Apart from the two original productions, any subsequent mountings of *The Boys Next Door* that could be noted as “stand outs” would be subjective per the next director’s vision. Still, the following three examples seem to be either the most in-line with Griffin and Abady’s original vision or serve as an intriguing (though not necessarily productive) expansion on the play’s possibility.

A Google image search for *The Boys Next Door* is an explosion of funny faces and poster collages of pictures featuring Norman and Sheila’s awkward donut date, Lucien’s big library books, Barry’s golf accouterments, and even maps of Russia for

Arnold. Yet, a 2012 production done in Australia by the Brisbane Arts Theatre appeared particularly compelling due to its age-diverse cast and an apt balance of the *Noises Off*-esque farcical tone with the true struggle felt by disabled and able-bodied characters alike. The production stills reflect the two crucial sides of this play's coin (see figs. 27, 28), but the most striking encouragement came from a discussion the reviewer had with the cast afterwards:

Interestingly (and touchingly), the very first question on each of their lips was not “Did you enjoy our show?” but “Tell me, did you feel that as actors we portrayed our characters with dignity and respect? It’s our intention to honour these people, and to not mock them in any way.” It is, potentially, a tricky and dangerous thing to produce a comedy about the intellectually disabled. But I was very happy to reassure them that *The Boys Next Door* is a funny, gentle, and compassionate offering which gives us license to let down our own masks and celebrate all that unites us as human beings. (Hendrie)

Such a generous review serves as a testament to the cast and production team and confirms the importance of respect and accuracy when crafting a production of this play.

On the contrary, a production worth noting for having missed the mark is Yosemite High School's in 2015: a version called *The Girls Next Door* (see fig. 29). The director, Lars Thorson, claims his decision to double-cast was simply to provide twice as many students with the opportunity to “play meaty, interesting roles” (Voorhis). The currently in vogue effort to gender-bend is admirable and popular, but the conundrum remains whether the effect of this particular antithesis furthers the impact of the show or distracts from it. Is the experiment blasphemous or brilliant? Unforgivably fraudulent or undeniably forward thinking? Whether it is “incorrect” or not, such a blatant liberty taken with the script—let alone the *title*—boils down to a bold interpretation that anyone who is invested in this play would not be able to resist seeing if given the chance. It inspires too

many questions not to be acknowledged for its potential scope of vision, regardless of whether such a risk proves to be innovative or foolhardy.

The last notable example is the production by the City Theatre Company of Austin, Texas, that performed January 15 through February 7, 2016, and seemed to excel in its interpretation. In terms of mere photography, Don Inman's production stills (see figs. 30, 32) are easily the highest quality amidst the vast content available online under this title. Each image exhibits the essence of the individuals—which, of course, merits the top applause to the actors as well—and the elementary, emboldened color palate mirrors the simple yet youthful spirit that emanates from these men and melts the audience into empathetic mush. This production clearly achieved the key elements of this play: vibrancy and heart, a seamless flow from hysterics to intimacy, and an action always ending in a group hug.

New York Times critic, Alvin Klein, wrote another review of a 1990 production of *The Boys Next Door* four years after seeing (and glowing about) the original Off-Broadway production:

Less than four years after a premiere at the McCarter Theater in Princeton, N.J., "The Boys Next Door" has become a small regional theater favorite. That's a wonder—and it's no wonder. For here is just the sort of play some people resist, misunderstand, or find threatening, but its emotional pull and entertainment value besides are considerable. In a less than satisfactory staging, the Emelin Theater production here nevertheless attests to the play's appeal and suggests that it will endure. (Klein)

As the piece goes on, he speaks with a slightly heavy heart at the lackluster production, but is obviously grateful that such an impactful piece has persisted and appears to have a bright future.

Problems—Perceived and Otherwise

Problematic Moments or Scenes

Jack's entrance and introduction is crucial. The audience is meeting Jack at his worst, both professionally and personally, so he must immediately present himself as a compassionate character. They must be charmed and inspired by him or no one will care about his journey or empathize with his eventual decision to leave his job of caring for "the boys." He must deliver his first line with kindness and without a hint of patronization. In this moment, he accepts these men for who they are and sets up that he maintains a positive attitude no matter what the challenge may be. If all goes well, the audience loves him immediately upon his first, gracious line:

ARNOLD. Not too many clouds in the sky today.

LUCIEN. Not too many . . . bunnies in the sky today. It's nice.

JACK. You're right, Lucien. I drove all the way over here and not one bunny. (10)

Jack's first direct-address to the audience is also a key moment. Arnold begins the play speaking to the audience, so the convention is set up, but Jack uses the audience more as a sounding board than Arnold does. By the time of his line, "The truth is, they're burning me out" (12), Jack needs to have already earned the audience's respect and admiration in order to make sure his confession does not confuse or alienate his new allies.

In general, anytime there is a scene in the living room with all the boys onstage, it is absolutely a question of "Who's on first" (12)? So many things happen at once, and the disabled characters' behaviors never take a break. This is evidenced by their pinball dialogue that keeps jumping from one to the other, so these large group scenes need to be thoughtfully choreographed to ensure 1) there is something always going on with each

character and 2) that the focus is where it is supposed to be at any given moment, even if the transitions are lightning quick. The rat-catching scene on page eighteen is extra problematic because most of it takes place in total darkness; or at least low light, depending on the design.

Problematic Actions

Besides the disability-specific behavior of the boys, the most challenging action to stage is the physical violence inflicted on Barry when his father comes to visit: “Mr. Klemper, impulsively, violently, slaps Barry across the side of the head” (50).

Problematic Character Interpretations

The character interpretations across the board are problematic if the actors do not take the proper time and preparation needed to dive into the disabled world of the characters. The message of the play discourages the excessive dumbing down of persons who are disabled. The actors’ task, then, is not to oversimplify these characters. They have many layers and an arsenal of complexities that must be explored and represented.

Problematic Character Interpretations Caused by Actors Who Have Previously Done This Role

There are no glaring character interpretations to avoid, although reviewers are consistently most critical of Jack. Perhaps he is simply no competition for the charming draw of the boys themselves and, by comparison, appears underwritten or lacking. Playing the straight man in a comedy is regularly a challenge and should be decidedly acknowledged in the rehearsal process.

Problems Posed by Casting Difficulties

The only clue the playwright gives about Jack is that he is a “wry man in his mid-thirties” (10). He may be the only able-bodied lead character, but to play the straight man

to a group of endearing, larger-than-life men takes a specific balance of graciousness, vulnerability, fight, and emotional strength.

Norman and Sheila have a fantasy sequence that involves dancing, so it is an intriguing challenge to find actors that have certain features to reflect or represent Down syndrome (such as increased weight and soft, round features) or Autism (which is generally undetectable physically), but that are also great dancers of at least one style—e.g. the waltz, contemporary jazz, modern dance, etc.

Casting the rest of the boys poses additional considerations. Throughout the script, Barry is described as “twenty-eight, full of positive conviction, a grade A schizophrenic with a chronic history of institutions, loony, teetering on the edge but clearly resourceful” (17). His speech pattern is similar to Arnold’s—a quick-moving mind plus confused utterances—but he needs to be less neurotic and absolutely serious. Arnold takes things so seriously that it sends him into a rage, but Barry takes things so seriously that it lulls him into delusion, creating a disconnect with reality that he is not even aware of. This character is not a clear type: funny but not a total comic relief, “off” but not in any obvious, visible way. Lucien presents another dichotomy: a balance of a childlike sensibility with a commanding physical presence, similar to Lenny in *Of Mice and Men*.

Problematic Representations of Race, Gender, Religion

Lucien is the only character described as a specific race (black). Besides the character description in the stage directions, the only moment that he is actually acknowledged as a person of color is when Barry’s father Mr. Klemper remarks offhandedly “I heard your roommate was a darkie” (Griffin 49). This line will have to be

disclosed to the actor offered the role to assure a level of comfort with such language or, as is often done, the line may be cut.

As mentioned above, a production of *The Girls Next Door* switched the genders of the main characters. The pronouns are easy enough to change, but such a core alteration must be carefully considered to ensure that nothing would be undercut by females playing male characters.

Problems Posed by the Theme of the Text

There is not much room for interpretation in such a simple text, but there is a great cacophony of pre-formulated opinions and current discussion forums regarding the disability community as a whole. This play is meant to open the audience's perspective, hopefully inspiring them to leave saying: Jack, we don't blame you. Boys, we don't limit you. Everyone will have an opinion about this show, and it is the creative team's job to ensure that the prevailing call to action is one of empathy and compassionate progress.

Problems Posed by Genres

One production's poster calls *The Boys Next Door* a tragicomedy and shows a starkly-colored black and red drawing of the four boys in chaos surrounding a woman, who is seemingly on her last leg, smoking a cigarette. This is completely the wrong tone for this playful play. It is a textbook comedy with extra doses of heart, giving the audience a more cathartic bang for their buck than expected. In terms of marketing, its comedic draw should be the focus. If the show is publicized as a disability play, it may create the same aversion someone may have to watching a potentially preachy or taxing documentary—the feeling echoed by the commonplace expression, “I don't feel like learning something tonight, I just want to be entertained!”

Problems Posed by the Status of the Text

The status of the text is gratefully simple—one version since 1986. There is a movie adaptation, but any changes made were due to the differences in medium rather than for creative reasons.

Problems Posed by Dialects

The locale of this setting is extremely vague—just New England and suburbia—so no specific regionalisms are required for this production.

Problems Posed by Pronunciation/References Made

1. “Who’s on first” (2)? Not everyone will understand this reference to Abbott & Costello’s famous joke of frustration and friendship.
2. “His deck has no face cards” (17); a phrase used to describe someone as *not being all there*; that is, of questionable mental capacity.
3. “Madame Defarge” (17). This is what Jack calls the deaf widow who knits and “listens” to Barry’s troubles; a notorious villain in Charles Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities* who knits with evil intentions, stitching the names of her intended victims into her patterns a la the Fates in ancient Greek mythology.

Problems Posed by a Need for Adaptation

The play is technically set in the year of its inception, 1986. Due to the use of the “R” word and other instances of potentially upsetting outdated beliefs or verbiage, it is the argument of this thesis that productions should insist on setting this text firmly in the 1980s as a disability history play so as to point out the disparagement of time between then and now. Regardless, the world in which the boys live is naturally a bit behind the current times anyway—in a suspended reality of sorts due to their cognitive delays.

Problems Posed by Unusual Linguistic or Rhetorical Styles

How the disabled characters speak is *hugely* important. Since able-bodied or extremely high-functioning actors must be cast in at least three of the disabled roles (Norman, Sheila and Lucien—the three characters that break reality and become able-bodied for a moment), the audience’s main clue for each character’s disability is through their speech pattern. The way they speak is not strictly comic, but is not naturalistic from an ableist perspective. However, the writing of the dialogue itself helps achieve this task immensely. Each character has a very specific voice that leaps off the page. It is obvious that the playwright was also an actor.

Problems Posed by Music or Need for Musical Score

“The Alphabet Song” (9), even in its briefest reference, requires copyright clearance. Additionally, the following directive could be problematic: “The music builds. They glide effortlessly across the floor, no longer Norman and Sheila, but something else. Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire” (34). The sweet, budding couple’s fantasy sequence is facilitated through a sweeping song that defies an otherwise awkward school dance. There is no specified track, so the director must choose which song whisks them (and the audience) away.

Problems Posed by Scenic Requirements

The play’s action takes place mainly in one location: the living room and kitchenette of the boys’ group home apartment. Once the scenery is set and dressed with copious amounts of the necessary props, there is not much else to facilitate besides the small side-scenes such as Mrs. Fremus and Barry’s golf lessons. The dance may require a center portion of the living room to be cleared, and possibly a couch moved upstage, but

the dance itself is rather episodic and there is never really a group number or outdoor scene that requires too much space.

Problems Posed by Special Effects

The main question in the world of creating effects is in how to execute the fantasy sequences. Is it with lights alone? Are there any other design element that can be brought in to strengthen or clarify the break in reality more than just a light or sound cue?

Problems Posed by the World of the Play

It would be pertinent for cast and crew to immerse themselves in the current status, successes, and struggles of the disabled community—including their local population. The show is trying to present a snapshot of what disability looks like today, so with the physical setting of the play being nondescript, the necessary research on class structures, ideologies, home stasis, and perceptions regarding how they as a community are received must be specific, accurate, and ever-present.

Applications

Technical Preparation

Limits and Advantages of the Venue and Set Design

The mainstage theatre of the community venue in Traverse City, Michigan, this production was mounted in is a solid and ample space, especially for shows written for a proscenium stage. Because of its building history as a former church, there is no fly space (as the second level above the stage houses the costume shop) and therefore the stage picture can seem short or cut-off from above (see figs. 3, 4). Despite the lack of height available, the ground space itself has the capacity for a wide breadth, which serves well for interior, unit sets such interiors for houses or buildings. There are also two options for

elevated balcony playing spaces on far stage right and left. Only the tallest balcony stage right was used in this production as Lucien's witness stand in the courtroom scene. The drastic contrast of being physically separated from the safe place of his home added to the dramatic and compelling effect of the moment (see fig. 5, the reference image for the desired effect).

The action of *The Boys Next Door* requires four entrances: a door to the bathroom, a door to Norman and Arnold's bedroom, a door to Barry and Lucien's bedroom, and a front door that leads to an outdoor walkway. These four doors, plus the word "door" in the title, offer the director the opportunity to lean into the enduring concept of constantly slamming doors that persist in the genre of farce. When it comes to slapstick comedy, such as the classic pace and choreographed chaos of *Noises Off*, the more doors the better. That is why the 2011 Cottage Theatre production's accentuated focus on the door was a key inspiration for the tone of our set (see fig. 6). Ultimately, a more realistic feel was decided upon so as to allow the characters themselves to shine in the absurd circumstances rather than couple it with an unnecessarily stylized visual concept. This production focused on a simple, vintage, and colorful look similar to the production photos that follow (see figs. 7, 8, 9, 10).



Fig. 3. McCormick, Matt. "Set Photograph of *Twelve Angry Men*." Performances 15-30 Jan. 2016, Old Town Playhouse, Matt McCormick Set Designer Personal Archives.

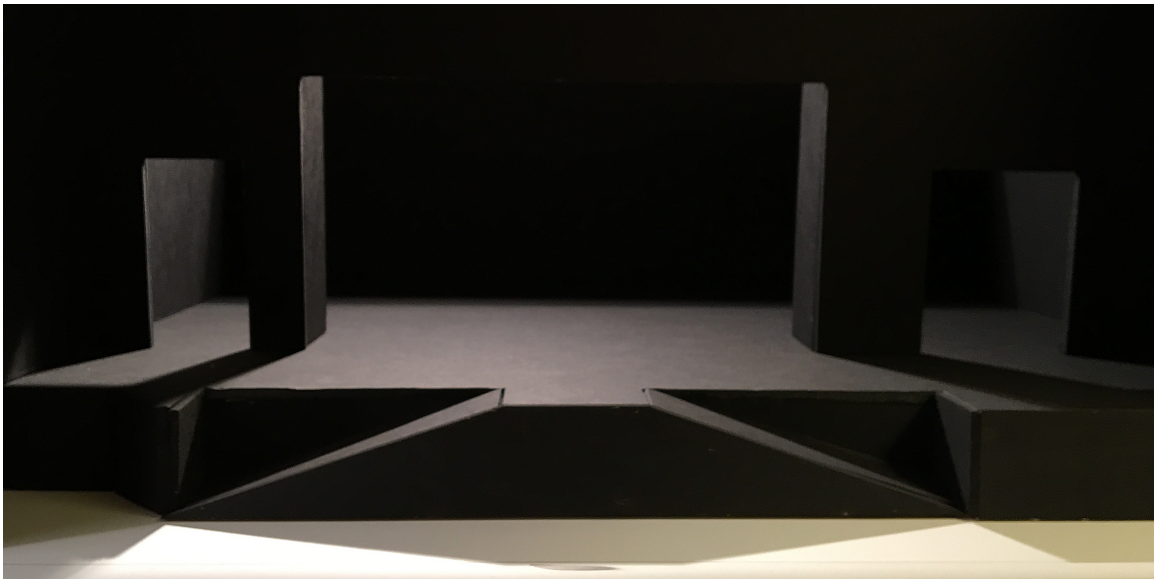


Fig. 4. McCormick, Matt. "Blank Set Model of Mainstage Theatre." 9 Jan. 2018, Matt McCormick Set Designer Personal Archives.



Fig. 5. Emrich, Matt. Production Photo, "The Boys Next Door," *Cottage Theatre*, Performances 10-26 Jun. 2011, www.cottagetheatre.org/the-boys-next-door.html. Accessed on 17 Jul. 2017.



Fig. 6. Emrich, Matt. Production Photo, "The Boys Next Door," *Cottage Theatre*, Performances 10-26 Jun. 2011, www.cottagetheatre.org/the-boys-next-door.html. Accessed on 17 Jul. 2017.



Fig. 7. Curtis, Zach and Al Broeffle. Production Photo, “The Boys Next Door,” *Paul Bunyan Playhouse*, 2010, Karn Severson Technical Director Personal Archives, www.karnseverson.com/paul-bunyan-playhouse-2010.html. Accessed on 16 Jul. 2017.



Fig. 8. Curtis, Zach and Al Broeffle. Production Photo, “The Boys Next Door,” *Paul Bunyan Playhouse*, 2010, Karn Severson Technical Director Personal Archives, www.karnseverson.com/paul-bunyan-playhouse-2010.html. Accessed on 16 Jul. 2017.



Fig. 9. Production Photo, “The Boys Next Door,” *Oregon City High School*, Feb. 1997, ochspioneers.org/drama/boys-next-door-1996-1997. Accessed on 16 Jul. 2017.



Fig. 10. Leigh, Amy. “converting garage to autism room sensory.” *Pinterest*, www.pinterest.com/pin/252131279116971958/. Accessed on 10 Dec. 2017.

Costumes

The clothing for this production needed to be specific to the time period yet remain essentially simple since the action mostly portrays day-to-day, i.e. casual, occurrences. Since the set had a slightly muted feeling, the costumes were able to be

more vibrant. This play is set in the late 1980s, but since the boys are said to be a bit behind the times, this production played with the idea that perhaps their individual styles ranged from the late 1960s to their current 1990s cusp—somewhere between the floral nostalgia of *The Wonder Years*, neon adolescence of *Saved by the Bell*, and pastel grunge of *Boy Meets World*, with a dash of elderly retirement community (see figs. 11, 12).

There was also a “hand me down” and mismatched aesthetic throughout—as if they were taken to Goodwill for financial reasons, but were then empowered to choose whatever items they liked. All of these considerations added to the unique personalities of each character while maintaining a consistent air of innocence.

Barry wears a golf outfit and Lucien wears a suit at one point, but neither clothing pieces need to be necessarily tailored or even convincing. Norman, Sheila, and Arnold attend a dance and wear their most fancy outfits but, again, their social outing wear would likely be from a thrift shop and not as nice or current as would have been expected for a prom or homecoming dance in atypical high schools or colleges of the day.

Both acts take place in the summer, mostly indoors, and the characters, aside from the boys or girls that live in the group home complex, dress true to the period. This visual nod in clothing, as well as in the set’s outdated color palate, proved to be enough to ensure that the audience knew the show took place in a different time period than the current one, which was important for the impact of the message.



Fig. 11. 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment. "25 Surprising Facts About *The Wonder Years*." Jennifer M Wood, *Mental Floss*, 31 Jan. 2018, mentalfloss.com/article/59286/28-fun-facts-about-wonder-years. Accessed 16 Feb. 2018.



Fig. 12. 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment. "25 Surprising Facts About *The Wonder Years*." Jennifer M Wood, *Mental Floss*, 31 Jan. 2018, mentalfloss.com/article/59286/28-fun-facts-about-wonder-years. Accessed 16 Feb. 2018.

Sound

The soundtrack of a production has the potential to be its most potent tool. Once the sound and music of a piece resonates, it instinctively informs the rest of the elements. Due to the theme in *The Boys Next Door* of nostalgia or being held back, the soundscape of this production gravitated toward the classics songs of old black and white movies and 1940's orchestras swaying with sweet female singers. The play begins and ends with Arnold, whose condition is singular; the songs chosen, therefore, subsequently paints him as a loner. The longing within the soothing voices of Gene Kelly, Doris Day, Frank Sinatra, and Judy Garland serves as a compelling support to the fight-or-flight existence Arnolds battles throughout the play. The group home is a safe place for each of these men, but Arnold is the most strident homebody of them all due to his extreme social anxiety. These vintage sounds provided the audience a further sub-textual insight into what Arnold's personal safe space sounds like. Other than those key transition pieces, the sounds, such as doorbells and car horns, were minimal. Songs from the 1980s, and as many as possible from 1986, were showcased as the playlist at the dance.

"Home On The Range" (Griffin 61) and "The Alphabet Song" (9) were sung in the show (per the script's suggestion) and were subject to an additional copyright that was not included in the rights package.

There were no microphones used in this production, as the acoustics of the theatre are ample enough for properly projected voices to be heard throughout the house and mezzanine.

Table 1
Sound Cues

Page	Cue	Sound Action
0	Preshow.	1940s easy swing crooner's music
9	LUCIEN. "It's a hard song."	Doorbell rings 1
9	ARNOLD. "... In the tub!"	Doorbell rings 2
21	BARRY. "... All these people ever want to do is golf."	Muted train sounds
23	BARRY. "... and he says he's coming down to visit me."	Doorbell rings 3
25	ARNOLD. "... I'm really glad they're not two-toned or something."	Car horn honking off stage 1
25	JACK. "Good idea ..."	Car horn honking off stage 2
26	JACK. "... And we both laughed."	Late 1980s dance music
28	ARNOLD. "Sure it's better."	Dance music fades out
28	BARRY. "... Not my dad."	Dance music fades back in
30	ARNOLD. "... and not pee. I've had great results."	Dance music fades out
31	LUCIEN. "Bumpy. Bumpy. Bumpy."	Dance music fades back in
32	<i>Norman goes to her and they begin to dance. They barely move.</i>	Music stops abruptly
32	NORMAN. "I bet it was good."	Music stars up again lightly
32	SHEILA. "I don't know. But I'd be some kind."	Music softens
33	JACK. "... Or I deserve better. Or somebody deserves something."	Music stops
34	NORMAN. "... I need my keys!"	Music stars up again lightly
34	<i>They dance. And from their shuffling awkward step, Norman and Sheila are transformed.</i>	Music builds to sweeping Old Hollywood waltz they glide to
35	Top of Act Two.	Song: "In Between" by Judy Garland
36	LUCIEN. "We got no trees."	Doorbell rings 4
46	<i>Barry steps back from the sign.</i>	Doorbell rings 5
51	ARNOLD. "... such bags under my eyes, you'd think I had amnesia."	State Senate Taped Introduction
52	<i>... so that there are two mounds of donuts on the table.</i>	Doorbell rings 6
61	ARNOLD. "... That's what this is. An angina party."	Doorbell rings 7
64	JACK. "Arnold! Arnold!!!"	Train Announcement 1
66	<i>Jack throws his arm around Arnold. They begin to walk.</i>	Train Announcement 2
66	Bows.	Song: "Will You Be There" by Michael Jackson

Lighting

Lighting is laid out very specifically in the script's stage directions. Most of the action takes place in the day or evening in the boys' apartment, and the playwright indicates in the introductory notes that the several other locations mentioned are to be "suggested with lighting, [stage] location, props, and set pieces" (Griffin 5). Warm tones were used to indicate moments that were especially vulnerable, and stark pin spots were chosen to highlight key dialogue, such as Lucien's suddenly abled-minded testimony on the witness stand.

The only items that were not always heeded to were the blackouts indicated at the end of most scenes. Instead, this effect was used very sparingly since audiences generally feel the urge to clap at blackouts. Without them, the show maintains its dramatic tension and momentum more successfully. Crossfades flow more seamlessly to ensure that the intended blackouts remained dynamic and impactful.

Table 2
Lighting Cues

Page	Cue	Lighting
0	Preset.	House lights up; amber wash onstage
0	Start of show.	House lights down
7	Arnold in place for Act One.	Flood whites fade up: APT DAY
12	JACK. "... 'Who's on first?'"	DR fade up, bright sun: BENCH
14	BARRY. "... Then hit that little round sucker as viciously as you can."	Flood whites fade back: APT DAY
17	JACK. "... I call it Madame DeFarge and the Golf Pro."	DL fade up: PORCH DAY
18	BARRY. "Clubs! I said. Clubs!"	Blues fade up: APT NIGHT OFF
18	ARNOLD. "Sssshhhhhh!!!"	Whites quick up: APT NIGHT ON
18	ARNOLD. "... shut 'em off!"	Whites quick out: APT NIGHT OFF
19	ARNOLD. "I'll get the lights."	Whites quick up: APT NIGHT ON
20	ARNOLD. "... But first, just in case, we'll turn off the lights."	Whites quick out: APT NIGHT OFF
20	ARNOLD. "... Take him. Take him."	UL door opens, light streams in

Table 2 *Continued*

Page	Cue	Lighting
20	ARNOLD. "We're going to flush him."	Whites quick up: APT NIGHT ON
20	ARNOLD. "I'll get the lights."	Whites quick out: APT NIGHT OFF
21	BARRY. "... All these people ever want to do is golf."	DC fade to bright amber: TRAIN
21	JACK. "... Don't deceive the public."	DL fade up whites: SIDEWALK
21	ARNOLD. "Did I get even or what?"	Flood whites fade up: APT DAY
25	NORMAN. "... Hello. Welcome to my iced tea."	DR fade to low light with flickering white pin spot: MOVIE THEATRE
26	JACK. "... And we both laughed."	Colored lights DS apron: DANCE
28	ARNOLD. "Sure it's better."	DL fade, blues up: PORCH NIGHT
28	BARRY. "... Not my dad."	Fade back to colored lights: DANCE
30	ARNOLD. "... and not pee. I've had great results."	DR fade up, bright sun: GARDEN
31	LUCIEN. "... Bumpy. Bumpy. Bumpy."	Fade back to colored lights: DANCE
32	SHEILA. "I don't know. But I'd be some kind."	DC fade to moonlight: OUTSIDE DANCE
33	JACK. "... Or I deserve better. Or somebody deserves something."	Music stops Fade back to colored lights: DANCE
34	<i>They dance. And from their shuffling awkward step, Norman and Sheila are transformed.</i>	Lights intensify in saturation of colors and level of gobo effects
34	End of dance.	Fade to blackout (end of Act One)
35	Lucien in place for Act Two.	DR fade up whites, spot: LIBRARY
35	LUCIEN. "... Lucien P. Smith says, 'Hi! Have a nice day! Hi!!!'"	DR fade to low light with flickering white pin spot: MOVIE THEATRE
35	ARNOLD. "... What does he think I am? An architect?"	Flood whites fade up: APT DAY
43	<i>Barry breaks down and sobs. . . . Lucien pats his head gently.</i>	DL fade up whites
44	JACK. "... Yes, Uncle Roland was quite a lightweight."	DC fade up, bright sun: PARK BENCH
46	CLARA. "Nononononononono . . ."	DR fade up whites: MOVIE OFFICE
46	ARNOLD. "... Who is Bob?"	Flood whites fade up: APT DAY
50	<i>Barry places the chocolates gently beside him gently . . .</i>	DR fade to low light with flickering white pin spot: MOVIE THEATRE
51	ARNOLD. "... such bags under my eyes, you'd think I had amnesia."	Fade to blackout
51	ANNOUNCEMENT. "... Order please."	Whites fade up DR and R balcony: COURTROOM
52	LUCIEN. "... A B C D E F . . ." <i>Silence. Lucien buries his head in his hands. He cannot continue.</i>	DR fades to black, R balcony intensifies into pin spot: WITNESS STAND

Table 2 *Continued*

Page	Cue	Lighting
52	<i>Lucien finishes and sits.</i>	Restore to COURTROOM
52	LUCIEN. “. . . I mean business!”	Fade to blackout; follow crossfade to flood whites up: APT DAY
56	NORMAN. “. . . Free doughnuts!”	DL fade up whites: SIDEWALK
56	ARNOLD. “. . . Just thinking about it gives me arthritis.”	DC fade low whites: INSTITUTION
58	<i>Jack exits. Barry sits motionless.</i>	Fade to blackout; follow crossfade to flood whites up: APT DAY
58	ARNOLD. “. . . The lights, Lucien, the lights. Ssshhh!!!”	Half whites quick out: APT DAY OFF
59	THE MEN. “Surprise! Surprise!!!”	All whites quick restore: APT DAY
64	JACK. “Arnold! Arnold!!!”	DC fade to bright amber: TRAIN
64	Bows.	Flood whites fade up: APT DAY
64	<i>Actors exit.</i>	House lights up; amber wash onstage

Props

A wide range of props were required for *The Boys Next Door*; namely a variety of hand props, personal props, and some items on the set itself, which thereby doubled as set dressing. All pieces are dictated by the script and clearly identified for the production team’s usage. Each object listed by the playwright is integral to the action.

Table 3
Properties List

Character	Prop
Arnold	Grocery bags (4) <i>containing</i> : Wheaties cereal boxes (9) Heads of lettuce (7) Bag of charcoal Milk quart Flashlight Aluminum bowl Shopping cart Small potted shrub Melvin’s shoes: black dress shoes Shoe polish Shoe brush Bath mat Welcome mat Melvin’s shoes: cowboy boots

Table 3

Continued

Character	Prop
	Large bag <i>containing</i> : Hand puppets of animals, etc. (8) Suitcase Map
Lucien	Stack of library books that are a dense, encyclopedic series Green library card Flashlight Sponge mop Window box with dirt Tomatoes Vacuum with cord Dusting rags (2) Pennies (2) Buttons (handful) Spiderman tie Aerosol can
Norman	Box of donuts Ring of keys Flashlight Pillow Rat Stack of mail Apron Dishes in sink Scrub brush Bubbles Platters of donuts (2) Kitchen timer Sheila's present: Donut box with thirty bows, <i>containing</i> : Newspaper packing Ring of keys Paper party plates Donuts to put on plates
Barry	Wall Street Journal Cardboard sign: blank Crayons Cardboard sign: golf lessons Cardboard sign: "Welcome Home, Dad!"

Table 3

Continued

Character	Prop
Jack	Grocery bag <i>containing</i> : Wheaties cereal box Deli sandwich Juice Band-Aid Book of golf tips Quarter Cluster of helium balloons
Mr. Hedges	Golf club: five iron (same as Barry's)
Mrs. Fremus	Knitting needles and yarn Golf club: five iron (same as Barry's)
Clara	Popcorn
Mr. Corbin	Tampons or Pads (handful)
Mr. Klemper	Paper bag (crumpled) <i>containing</i> : Cheap boxed heart of chocolates wrapped in cellophane
Sheila	Bouquet of wildflowers from gas station (2)

Budget and Production Timeline

The budgets for all productions at the community theatre were set by the Executive Director and Production Resource Manager upon selection of the season.

Table 4

Production Budget for *The Boys Next Door*, 2017-2018 Season

Item	Allotment
Set	\$800
Props	\$300
Costumes	\$750
Hair/Make-up	\$125
Lighting	\$200
Sound	\$200
Programs & Posters	\$1200
TOTAL	\$3575

Table 5
Production Timeline for *The Boys Next Door*, 2017-2018 Season

Schedule Item	Dates
Audition Dates	January 22 and 23, 2018
Tech Sunday	March 11, 2018
Dress Rehearsal	March 15, 2018
Performances	March 16, 17, 22, 23, 24, 25, 29, 30, 31 at 7:30pm March 18, 25 at 2:00pm March 24 at 2:00pm *Sensory-Friendly Performance

Auditions

One month before auditions, an audition packet was compiled and made available for download in PDF format on the theatre's website under the Upcoming Auditions page. It included the following: a personal welcome from the director, brief overview of what interested attendees should know about the event before auditioning, quick synopsis of the plot, name list and group picture of the design and production team, details of the audition schedule, dates of the general rehearsal and production schedules (to eventually be finalized upon casting per the actors' individual conflicts), character descriptions, audition sides, resources about the disabled community and the inclusive values of this production, and other helpful links to assist in their preparation. Providing as much preparatory material as possible was crucial in assessing which actors made an obvious, concerted effort to portray respectful representations of these characters, even in the initial audition stage.

The audition process yielded approximately forty participants trying for the seven male roles and two female roles. It was important to cast as wide a net as possible in

terms of options and combinations of actors since the chemistry of the boys is at the heart of this piece. Because of this, the age range of the character descriptions were made intentionally vague, and the packet included a note about the intention of seeking out the utmost diversity in this cast—specifically race, age, and ability.

Rehearsal Journal

Week 1: January 29-February 1

Once casting was finalized, the goals of the first week were to expose the actors to the fact that they were representing the disabled community, impress upon them the responsibility and commitment expected within this process, and build ensemble and textual understanding through table work. The ensemble was asked to take an anonymous survey about what they knew or did not know about the disabled experience in general and in their own community. A read-through took place at the first gathering and then basic table work began. Scene by scene, the cast was asked about the play's given circumstances, the specific objectives of their characters, the core question of the larger action, and what impression they had so far about whom they were portraying.

Having discussions about both literal and ideological elements of *The Boys Next Door* around a table versus on a stage created a safe, intellectually-peaked environment that allowed actors to share, question, and listen deeply to new ideas and perspectives. This substantial dive into text work served as a solid foundation from which to begin blocking the next week.

Week 2: February 5-8

In order to encourage further ownership of their roles, each cast member was asked to prepare and share a research presentation on the particular impairment that his or

her character was affected by. Empowered by concrete knowledge and exercised vulnerability in the presentation of sensitive facts, this exercise built on the previous week's conjectures and aptly prepared them to begin the physical staging process.

The remaining three days of rehearsal were dedicated to accomplishing a skeletal set of blocking. Moving as sequentially as possible per the schedules of the volunteer performers, an initial draft of most of the first act was completed—skipping all of the dance scenes so that those could be done all at once the next week, which helped to maintain continuity and enhance retention.

That Friday, the cast and crew visited a special education classroom in the local area. Students with varying disabilities were introduced to the group and certain members of the cast were asked to help them with tasks during the course of the lessons. This experience primed the ensemble to participate in an upcoming volunteer opportunity with those same individuals: chaperoning their Spring dance. This type of event was extremely similar to the social dance that happens in *The Boys Next Door*. The cast members were asked to gather afterwards, take a moment to note or journal about any physical or verbal behaviors they observed that they felt would be productive to incorporate into the portrayal of their character, and share it with the rest of the ensemble.

Week 3: February 12-15

With the foundational blocking begun, this week of rehearsals went more quickly than the first in terms of productivity. The first day was dedicated to the three scenes that make up the dance sequence at the end of act one. The remaining three days were devoted to setting down basic blocking for act two—making sure to run what was blocked that day at the end of each rehearsal.

After the previous weeks of engaged, wholehearted dialogue around the themes and intentions of this play, such a sudden focus on quick and simple tasks such as moving across the stage and knowing one's cue could seem tedious and potentially futile. It was vital to remind the actors that this part of the process would be done soon and that laying this groundwork would eventually afford them the opportunity to explore in a meaningful way again very soon.

Week 4: February 19-22

The week began with the cast performing a stumble through, which also served as a designer run for the production team to watch and reference as they continued to execute their builds and creative planning. To run through the entire play after only touching the scenes a few times was difficult but imperative to the process. The deadline to be off book, or memorized, was the day after the stumble through. This goalpost adequately captured what about the production needed the most work and what had made the most progress so far. The only notes taken were not on the specific performances, but on what chunks of the play deserved the most attention going forward. Once this work list was agreed upon with the assistant director, the cast was notified of what specific scene work was to be tackled over the next three days that week.

After the larger run, the show was in a solid place, so the focus was turned towards more individualized work with small scenes or solo moments. Now that the actors knew their basic logistical movements on and off stage, they were ready to develop their characters even more specifically. Smaller rehearsal settings proved highly effective, allowing them to ask more questions about how much to show or not show their impairment and how to tackle tough textual items such as saying the word, retarded,

and executing a scene with physical abuse. The performers were more concerned than ever with making sure that their portrayals were reverent and accurate. This one-on-one work empowered them to lean further into their character's disability and into their, and their character's, questions surrounding disability.

Week 5: February 26-March 1

Individualized scene work continued through the first portion of this week, making sure that each character had been specifically attended to at least once. The actors playing Jack, Arnold, and Lucien were brought in to work on their monologues, and smaller pairs such as Norman and Sheila were called together to establish more of a connection per their romantic inclinations.

On the third rehearsal out of the four that week, a work through of act one began. The actors would begin running a scene and then would be stopped if something needed to be addressed: i.e., fixed or deepened. Act one was worked through over the course of two rehearsals, and act two was left until the next week.

Week 6: March 5-8

This week began with a two-day work through of act two, following the structure from the last week's work through of act one. Though there were more stopping points requested in act two than act one, because more time was given to act one's initial blocking, the cast was starting to show substantial growth, momentum, and confidence in their performances.

On the third day of rehearsals, another run-through was scheduled. The designers were welcome again, but there were also some extra guests invited: members of the local disabled community. In attendance were special education teachers, employees from the

Northern Michigan Disability Network, students and adults with various disabilities, and the family members and caretakers of those individuals. Invitees were told beforehand that this was not a specifically designed sensory-friendly performance, but that they were allowed and encouraged to vocalize and experience the show as came naturally to them. For those interested in giving feedback, paper surveys were handed out for them to complete in the theatre and email surveys were also sent afterwards so that the request for feedback could be tailored per their convenience. The survey inquired about their experience of watching a play about disability: how successful it was at depicting the disabled experience, what felt acutely accurate, what felt inauthentic, what (if anything) was offensive, etc. The cast gathered the next day during rehearsal to discuss their experience of the previous day's run, as well as to review the feedback given by the guest expert audience regarding what was success and not about the onstage portrayal of their intention to represent and empower that community. The discussion was informative and moving, and the performers felt inspired and educated as to how best to move forward.

Tech Week: March 12-14 and Dress Rehearsal: March 15

Tech week began on the Saturday before opening night. Starting towards the early part of the day, the cast arrived early to dress in full costume and make-up for the first time and while the designers and crew performed a paper tech (a run-through of the light and sound cues without the actors present). Once the performers were in costume and the stage manager was ready, a full run-through commenced. Notes were mainly taken on design and production elements, and the cast was only asked to stop twice for major logistic issues. At the end of the day, an hour-long photo call was scheduled for marketing content and archival purposes.

From the next evening on, the performers and crew members were called at the start time that was consistent with show's run. On Monday evening, a complete run was done and notes were emailed out that night. Tuesday was an evening off, in consideration of the lengthened time commitment required of opening weekend. Wednesday was another run of the show with emailed notes that followed, and Thursday's invited dress rehearsal held approximately thirty friends and family members from cast and crew. Because *The Boys Next Door* is a classically structured comedy with moments of direct address to the audience, an effort was made to have at least ten people in the audience at the run-throughs on Monday and Wednesday so that the actors could have as much practice as possible at holding for laughs and talking to the crowd.

Performances

The Boys Next Door was chosen to be produced for many reasons, but the most obvious reason is its capacity for humor. As expected, audiences roared with laughter at the hijinks of these lovable men as they navigate their varied environments and diverse social experiences. Also, as expected, individual patrons consistently expressed that they were deeply affected by the moments when the disabled characters broke out of their disability. It was encouraging, though, to hear comments that were also genuinely insightful regarding the disabled experience; comments that had been illuminated for them per some items that they did not realize before. There was also mention of how different the landscape is today versus the 1980s, and simultaneous acknowledgments that there is still more progress to be had. A few elements outside of the script itself, such as the sound design's use of the Judy Garland song "In Between," was noted as a thoughtful item that made a patron and a parent think differently about what a

marginalized person may be experiencing. This served as evidence that the production had accomplished its goal of being both entertaining and enlightening. The ticket sales were solid and grew exponentially throughout the ten performances.

As with most productions, and especially comedies, the show found its stride more and more concretely as the run progressed. Perpetual feedback from able-bodied and disabled individuals alike continued to shape the complexity of the performances. The effect of this piece on the community showed the actors what a positive impact can be made by engaging with a sensitive subject as long as it is done with intention, respect, courage, and a never-ceasing drive to learn more.

*Visual and Textual Responses
to the Playscript*

Non-Literal

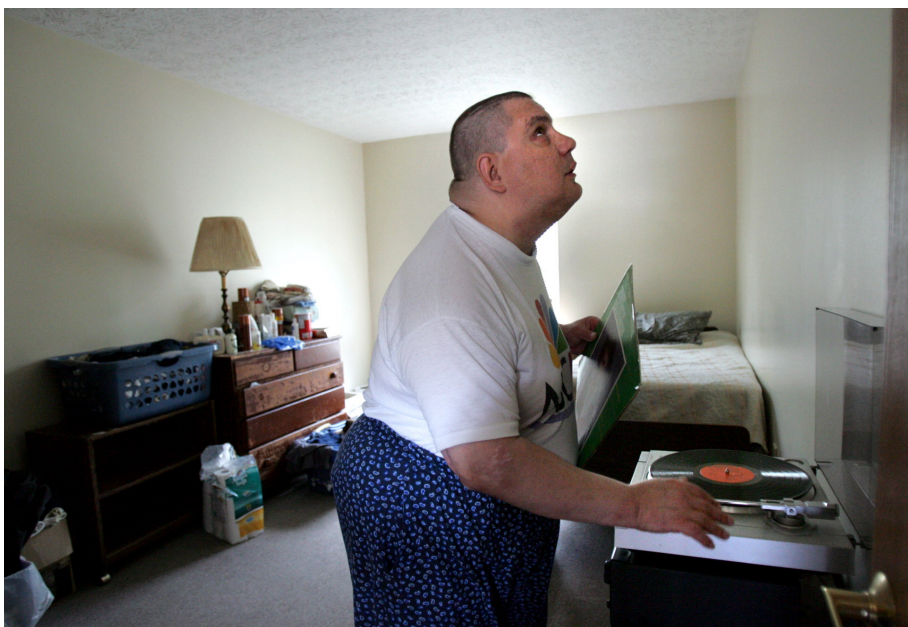


Fig. 13. Group Home—Man with blindness and Schizophrenia in his room playing music. Kissinger, Meg. “How Can Milwaukee County’s Broken Mental Health System Be Fixed?” *Journal Sentinel*, 2013, archive.jsonline.com/news/milwaukee/chronic-crisis-how-can-milwaukee-countys-broken-mental-health-system-be-fixed-229974841.html#housing. Accessed 27 Nov. 2016.



Fig. 14. Group Home—Man with Autism in front of community housing. “Housing and Community Living.” *Autism Speaks*, www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/housing-and-community-living. Accessed 27 Nov. 2016.



Fig. 15. Group Home—Residents of group housing for individuals with Autism. “Group Home Vacancies.” *Autism Services of Mecklenburg County*, www.autismservices.org/residential_group_home.php#. Accessed 27 Nov. 2016.



Fig. 16. Group Home—Example of residential services available, “Becky’s House.” “Becky’s House.” Medicaid Waiver Services: Residential Services, *Ability Connection Texas*, www.abilityconnectiontexas.org/medwaiversvcs.php. Accessed 27 Nov. 2016.



Fig. 17. Group Dance—Girl with Down syndrome busting a move. Ellis, Tom. “Down Syndrome Community Sweetheart Dance.” *Tom Ellis Photography Blog*, 27 Feb. 2016, www.tomellisphoto.com/blog/down-syndrome-community-sweetheart-dance-2016/. Accessed 27 Nov. 2016.



Fig. 18. Group Dance—Boy with Down syndrome showing his skills. Rogers, Kevin. “I Danced with Angels.” *The Orphan Age: Loners Learning About Community*, 5 Dec. 2015, revkevinrogers.blogspot.com/2015/12/i-danced-with-angels.html. Accessed 27 Nov. 2016.



Fig. 19. Painting by Disabled Artist—Man has no lower arms or right foot. Smith, Simon Mark—Painter. “The Amazing Art of Disabled Artists.” *Webdesigner Depot*, www.webdesignerdepot.com/2010/03/the-amazing-art-of-disabled-artists/. Accessed 27 Nov. 2016.



Fig. 20. Graphic depicting the struggle for mental health. Thibault, Sebastian—Graphic Artist. Article by Patricia Wen. “Finding the Best Therapist Can Be Confusing.” *The Boston Globe*, 4 Feb. 2014, www.bostonglobe.com/lifestyle/health-wellness/2013/02/04/choosing-right-mental-health-professional-can-daunting-task/8fSmTOU7SYe5LDKFo4cazl/story.html. Accessed 27 Nov. 2016.



Fig. 21. Vincent Van Gogh—Artist known for combating an anguishing mental illness, including “depression, paralyzing anxiety, symptoms of bipolar disorder” (Popova). Caroline—Digital Artist. “The Many Faces of Heroism.” *My Hero Virtual Art Gallery*, myhero.com/gallery/open.asp?art=van. Accessed 27 Nov. 2016.

Literal



Fig. 22. Al Hirschfeld Quill Pen & Ink Drawing of “Josh Mostel in The Boys Next Door,” 1988. Hirschfeld, Al. “Josh Mostel in The Boys Next Door.” Quill Pen and Ink Drawing. *Al Hirschfeld Archive*, The Margo Feiden Galleries Ltd., 1988, www.alhirschfeld.com/cgi-bin/popup?ID=2125&CAT=A2. Accessed 22 Oct. 2016.

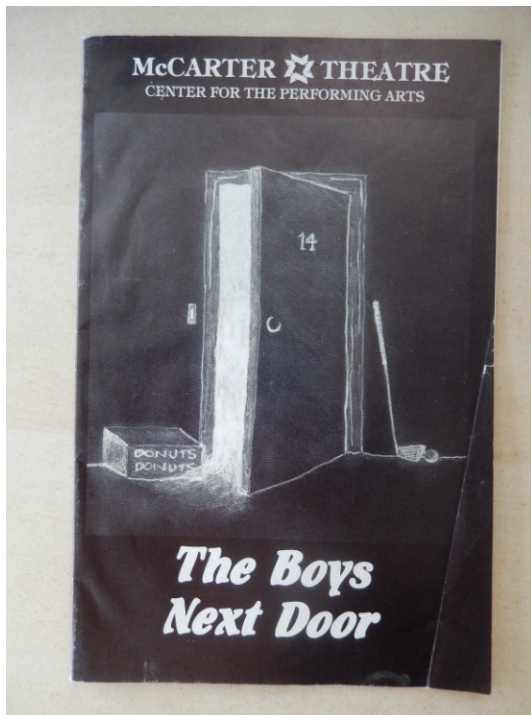


Fig. 23. Original Production Playbill, McCarter Theatre, 1986. "June 1986 - McCarter Theatre Playbill - The Boys Next Door - Alan Ruck." *Ebay*, www.ebay.co.uk/itm/June-1986-McCarter-Theatre-Playbill-The-Boys-Next-Door-Alan-Ruck-/291745376614. Accessed 21 Oct. 2016.

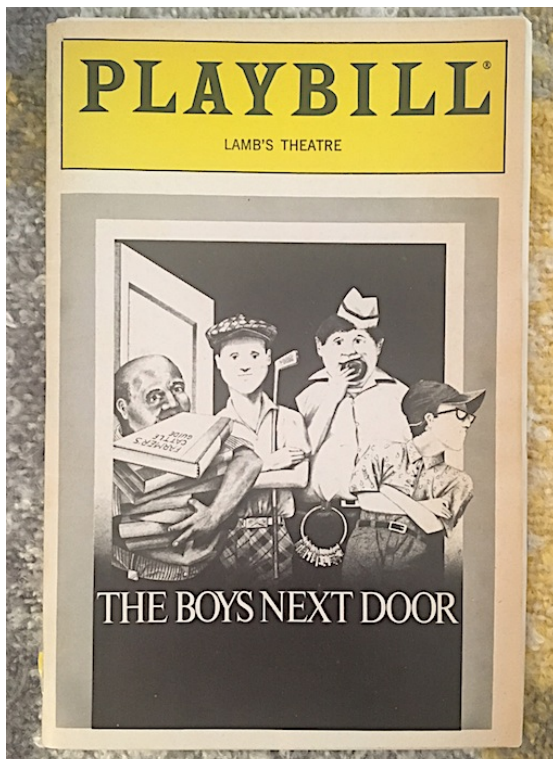


Fig. 24. Original Production Playbill, Lamb's Theatre, 1987. "The Boys Next Door." *Playbill*, Lamb's Theatre, 23 Nov. 1987, Original Off-Broadway Program. Print.

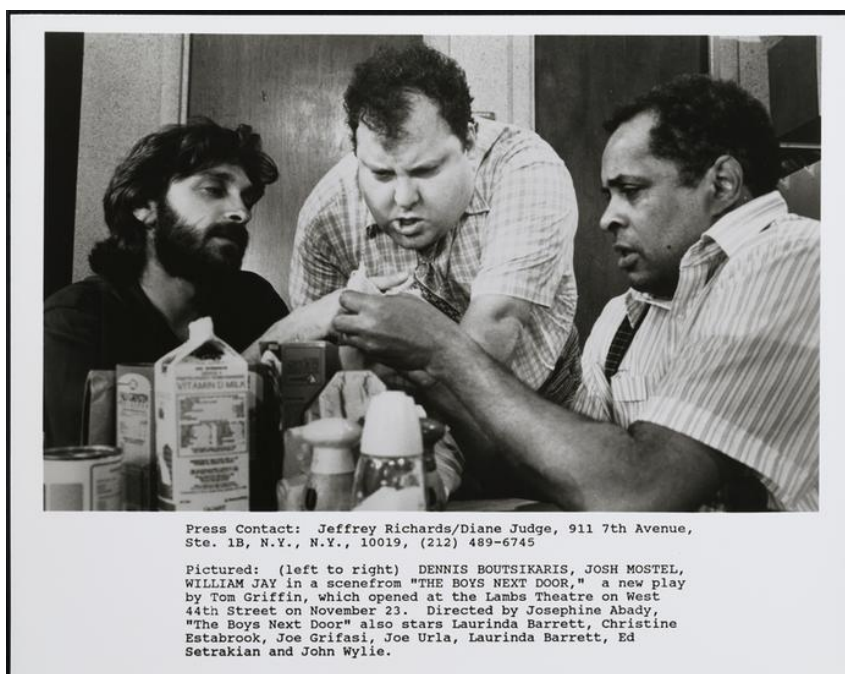


Fig. 25. Original Production Photo, Off-Broadway Run at Lamb's Theatre, 1987.
 "Search Results for: The Boys Next Door Play." *Museum of the City of New York*,
collections-static-5.mcny.org/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&VBID=24UAYWE1V19VG.
 Accessed 22 Oct. 2016.



Fig. 26. Original Production Photos, Off-Broadway Run at Lamb's Theatre, 1987.
 "Search Results for: The Boys Next Door Play." *Museum of the City of New York*,
collections-static-5.mcny.org/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&VBID=24UAYWE1V19VG.
 Accessed 22 Oct. 2016.



Fig. 27. Production Photo, Brisbane Arts Theatre, Australia, 2012. Hendrie, Jo. “The Boys Next Door” Review, *XS Entertainment*, 14 Mar. 2012, www.xsentertainme.wordpress.com/2012/03/14/the-boys-next-door/. Accessed 22 Oct. 2016.



Fig. 28. Production Photos, Brisbane Arts Theatre, Australia, 2012. Hendrie, Jo. “The Boys Next Door” Review, *XS Entertainment*, 14 Mar. 2012, www.xsentertainme.wordpress.com/2012/03/14/the-boys-next-door/. Accessed 22 Oct. 2016.



Fig. 29. Production Poster “The *Girls Next Door*,” Yosemite High School, CA, 2015. Clugston, Gina. “YHS Play: Meet the Boys and Girls Next Door.” *Sierra News Online*, 12 November 2015, www.sierranewsonline.com/yhs-play-meet-the-boys-and-girls-next-door/. Accessed 20 Oct. 2016.



Fig. 30. Production Photo, City Theatre Company, Austin, TX, 2016. Photo Credit Don Inman. “Performance Photos by Don Inman: The Boys Next Door by Tom Griffin, City Theatre, January 15–February 7, 2016.” *CTX Live Theatre*, www.ctxlivetheatre.com/news/performance-photos-by-don-inman-the-boys-next-d/. Accessed 21 Oct. 2016.



Fig. 31. Production Photo, City Theatre Company, Austin, TX, 2016. Photo Credit Don Inman. "Performance Photos by Don Inman: The Boys Next Door by Tom Griffin, City Theatre, January 15–February 7, 2016." *CTX Live Theatre*, www.ctxlivetheatre.com/news/performance-photos-by-don-inman-the-boys-next-d/. Accessed 21 Oct. 2016.



Fig. 32. Production Photo, City Theatre Company, Austin, TX, 2016. Photo Credit Don Inman. "Performance Photos by Don Inman: The Boys Next Door by Tom Griffin, City Theatre, January 15–February 7, 2016." *CTX Live Theatre*, www.ctxlivetheatre.com/news/performance-photos-by-don-inman-the-boys-next-d/. Accessed 21 Oct. 2016.

CHAPTER III

PROMPTBOOK

Given Circumstances

Environmental Facts

Geographical Location

The Boys Next Door offers a glimpse into the daily lives of four men with various disabilities and the social worker who cares for them. The group home is located in a portion of New England within an intentionally nondescript suburban area. Though the play's scenes travel between several indoor and outdoor locations within the surrounding neighborhood, the main action takes place in the apartment itself: a modest two-bedroom within a larger property called the Stonehenge Villa apartment complex. Also referred as The Center, it provides accommodations for men and women of all needs in the hopes that the inhabitants are able to live as independently as possible.

The playwright, Tom Griffin, makes a special point of describing how *un-special* the main setting is. The living room and the adjacent efficiency kitchen is a “rather unimaginatively designed and decorated space” with typical items such as a stove, refrigerator, sink, couch, small breakfast table, chairs, etc. Griffin states: “It is neither neat nor sloppy, but it is certainly lived in. There is ‘stuff’ around and there are ‘things’ about” (*The Boys* 4). The space is one that offers the residents comfort without potential sensory disruption and allows the audience a neutral slate from which to observe.

Date: Year/Season/Time of Day

This play is set in the time that it was written: 1986. Griffin also specifically notes that the arc of the story takes place in the season of summer, suggesting a brushstroke of ease and warmth permeating the boys' adventures. Such a balmy temperature opens up the possibility of locations, allowing characters to walk to the grocery store, run into each other during a stroll for popcorn, and give golf lessons. This strengthens Lucien's nerve-racking experience of feeling even further uncomfortable when having to wear a suit for his hearing with the State Senate. Multiple times of day are showcased throughout the play, from after work to weekend chores to evening social functions to late night rat catching. Such a range of schedule gives the audience a wider perspective on what a full day, or even week, in the life of the boys truly looks like. It also strengthens the monotony Jack expresses feeling trapped under as he contemplates leaving.

Economic Environment

From 1981 to 1989, the economy was led by the Ronald Reagan administration. Based around the idea of supply-side economics, the national agenda focused around reducing marginal tax rates to encourage citizens to work longer and harder and, in turn, to make it more attractive to save and invest. Reagan's central belief circled around the idea that the federal government had become too intrusive. Throughout his tenure, he sought to reduce or eliminate certain government regulations and pushed through a series of tax cuts. Such actions also resulted in the cutting of a large amount of social programs. After a deep recession in 1982, the economy rebounded within a year and enjoyed one of the longest extended periods of sustained economic growth since World War II until a stock market crash in the fall of 1987.

Political Environment

On October 16, 1987, the headline of a front-page article in *The New York Times* read “New Reagan Policy to Cut Benefits for the Aged, Blind and Disabled” (Pear). The administration had adopted a new policy that would reduce welfare benefits for approximately 4.3 million people who were receiving free food, shelter, or clothing from charitable organizations through the Supplemental Security Income program. More than sixty percent of the recipients were unable to provide for themselves due to their disabilities, yet any non-cash assistance received was now required to be counted as income to be taxed.

Encouraged by the effectiveness of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, advocates for disability rights began to mobilize to address the physical and social barriers facing the disabled community and demand that federal legislation be put in place to protect individuals who required accommodations within the current societal systems. After decades of lobbying, protesting, educating, and campaigning, one of the most important pieces of legislature within the disability rights movement came to fruition. Passed in 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability and ensured equal treatment and access for people with disabilities as well as increase employment opportunities and public accommodations. Since the mid-1900s, people with disabilities have been marginalized, and have fought for their disability to be recognized as a small aspect of their identity rather than a defining one. Though they continue to battle deep-rooted assumptions, stereotypical prejudices, and irrational fears, this pivotal piece of legislation the United

States government validated and mandated the full participation, inclusion, and integration of disabled individuals in all levels of society.

Social Environment

Due to the upswing in awareness regarding the rights and capabilities of disabled individuals, the late 1980s were centered around the advocacy for autonomy. Such efforts culminated in the Independent Living Movement (ILM), which validated the need for and inherent worth of such group homes as the apartment featured in *The Boys Next Door*. In an able-bodied culture, a disabled individual's difference was generally seen as something to pity, fix, or glorify. Those with disabilities were assumed to be victims of their state and, if any challenges were faced, the impairment was blamed. The overall impression was that having a disability automatically constituted that person as needing extreme help or support. Another largely held belief was that the so-called afflicted considered their disability to be central to their identity and experience within the world. These impressions were deep-rooted by the time this play was written. Though disabled individuals were gaining modes for more independent living, they were still generally kept separate from the abled members of society.

Religious Environment

The relationship between disability and religion varies widely depending on a particular religious group's held belief towards the reason God et. al. made someone handicapped. Throughout history, disabled individuals were perceived either as a righteous charge for a believer's generosity to be tested on, or as a body that had been punished and would therefore need to be exorcized. Often, charitable organizations were the only place for these societal outcasts to turn.

By the 1980s, there were organizations that had recognized the need for a larger body of knowledge around not only facilitating a disabled individual's faith and practice, but also allowing paths for those with cognitive differences to become active participants and even leaders in the church. One such collective, the Religion and Spirituality Division of the American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR), finally gained traction in their ministry after a surge in membership and awareness in 1971. It focused on disability advocacy among religious congregations and encouraged interfaith dialogue and networking among religious professionals. In 1991, it made targeted efforts to broaden their largely Catholic and Protestant base by adding several members of the Jewish community to their cause (Schurter 116). As the passage of disability civil rights laws continued to be created and passed, disabilities were more acknowledged and understood. With organizations such as the Division looking to expand the breadth of knowledge of what the church and its parishioners can do for those with disabilities, long-held myths—originally promoted by the early church—were slowly dispelled. Disabled individuals and their families could practice their faith, or even spiritual career aspirations, with less resistance from within the community that initially demonized them.

Previous Action

The previous action of the play is established through two direct address monologues. The first lines make up a speech by Arnold, one of the boys living in the group home. He states:

My name is Arnold Wiggins. I'm basically a nervous person. People call me Arnold because I don't have a nickname. So I pretend that Arnold is my nickname so that when people call me Arnold, I pretend that they are close personal friends who know me by my nickname: Arnold. I live here at the Stonehenge Villa

apartment complex in a group apartment with three other guys. Did I mention I'm a nervous person? Well, frankly, I am. (Griffin, *The Boys* 7)

By beginning with a broader overview coupled with jarringly personal phrases of deprecating self-identification, then launching into a tirade of minutiae about the grocery store incident that is very important to him but very confusing to the audience, Arnold sets the tone for equal parts of disjointed chaos and heart-warming vulnerability that the play will present over the next two acts.

At the conclusion of the first scene, Jack Palmer delivers another monologue, spoken directly to the audience. He explains, in essence, what just happened. Jack gives the viewers a background for what they are seeing and what part he plays in facilitating it. For an audience that will assumedly be largely able-bodied, Jack's perspective is both a relief and a pointed reminder of the questions and biases the non-disabled must face when confronted with someone with different needs. In the same first speech, he confesses that "the truth is, they're burning me out" (12). This introduces the driving conflict of the play—that is, of whether or not he will stay in this job—and teases the larger dramatic question about what any able-bodied individual's call to action is within the disabled community. Will Jack help or ignore? Engage or quit? If he or any able-bodied person in that situation left, is it considerate or is it cowardly? Arnold's speech sets the comedic tone that simultaneously demands intent listening, and Jack's speech establishes the foundation for the challenging yet necessary charge of self-reflection.

Polar Attitudes

Though this play classifies as an ensemble-based production, there are two clear perspectives represented: the disabled and the abled. Though there are multiple characters

that identify under each of those groups, Jack and Arnold are the key vessels through which the dramatic question is conveyed.

Arnold Wiggins

As previously mentioned, Arnold begins the play by immediately sharing his affliction of extreme anxiety with a group of strangers. In expressing a desire to have a nickname instead of offering a bizarre solution of declaring a first name as a nickname, the playwright establishes that Arnold and the rest of the boys are all at once clever and delusional, and quite lonely in their experience—especially Arnold who has to fight a bully at work. Because Arnold speaks directly to the audience, they are able to get a rare glimpse into the thought pattern of one of the disabled individuals they are watching. Though Arnold's thought process is not necessarily the exact way of thinking that the other disabled characters experience, witnessing this jumbled cognition opens up the audience to consider what might be going on in the other three men's heads and how that thought pattern may differ from their own.

Arnold suffers from Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), severe social anxiety, and is likely on the high-functioning end of the autism spectrum. He is in his forties and acts as the self-appointed head of the household (when Jack is not there) due to his need for control and his relative intelligence. His fear of things not being done correctly causes him to fly him into spouts of intense agitation and often rage. If he ever leaves the room due to his upset, though, he calls out to those he has left to ensure that they know he is still angry and that he is not forgotten. He does not wish to be alone, but his OCD tendencies cause him to become violently nervous and frustrated when he is not able to control the situation. Arnold also has a fascination with leaving to a faraway land

and threatens to go to Russia anytime he becomes excessively angry. Each of the men have their own such behavior pattern when events happen that upset them, according to their individual impairment. Still, the audience feels a particular kinship with Arnold because he speaks with them directly, in confidence and genuine openness. For example, he ends his first speech by asking: “Do you think I did the right thing” (8)?

Jack Palmer

Jack Palmer is a man in his mid-thirties who has been employed to supervise seventeen disabled men amongst five group homes for the past eight months. Throughout the course of the play, Jack speaks several tell-all monologues to the audience that reveal his not-so-secret wariness under his current work situation. In addition to the funny yet exhausting antics shown onstage, Jack tells the audience further stories of his inhabitants’ incidents: Arnold’s reading a phone book sideways to try and find hidden maps of Russia or Lucien pulling the fire alarm in the middle of the night because he needed aspirin. When Jack finally returned home at 3:00 a.m. after the latter incident, it caused him to throw his own toaster across the room, shattering it out of sheer frustration. Jack’s demeanor in front of the audience, however, is contemplative and joking—as if he has to keep laughing in order to keep from crying.

Like Arnold, Jack shares facts about his life that indicate he is lonely, or at least feels alone without having someone else who might understand what he is going through. He eats lunch by the railroad tracks and is divorced. Eventually he leaves this position to become a travel agent, which suggests his desire to escape. The ending scene shows Arnold and Jack at a train station—a place where Jack has normally been alone and where Arnold has always assumed he would feel free but instead feels scared and more

lonely than ever. The two dichotomous characters are intentionally similar, shining a light on the fact that the only real, and frankly minimal, difference they face between them is a level of medically-diagnosed impairment.

Dialogue

Choice of Words

Each character has his own cadence, vocabulary, and even catchphrase that delineates their personalities and grants the audience insights into the inner worlds of their particular impairments. Lucien calls the State Senate “the State Sneck” (26) and also refers to himself in the full, formal nomenclature of “Lucien P. Smith” (8). This indicates his lack of capacity for higher learning and establishes him as the lowest-functioning man of the four. Arnold not only repeats many words and phrases, which is indicative of his repetitive OCD patterns, but he also says the words “I repeat!” often. In the way a hypochondriac would, he speaks about different and often-inaccurate diseases that he might catch because of a stressful situation, e.g. angina and arthritis. Such sensational threats are attempts to gain attention and sympathy, and to assert his wished-for superiority. Norman says “Oh boy” in a number of varying situations and talks about doughnuts and keys consistently since those are both items that bring him joy, pride, and a sense of identity. Sheila, likely of the same disability as Norman, also has a textual identifier. She says “or something” at the end of most sentences, which indicates a sheepish, sweet quality of insecurity and is especially prevalent when she’s around Norman, her crush.

Jack speaks notably in a “normal” way—meaning in a neuro-normative pattern of expected words and phrases for the time. The dialogue he uses is intentionally light and

of a joking manner. Barry, the fourth man in the group home, speaks in a deceptively normal way as well. As a high-functioning schizophrenic, he is highly adept in social situations until his trauma is triggered and causes him to shut down completely.

*Choices of Phrases and
Sentence Structure*

Arnold speaks only in declarative statements. He is always trying to decipher or defend the situation, and is sudden and loud when he figures things out or feels thwarted and undermined. As per his condition, he speaks in lists as well. Though he speaks in a text pattern that is extremely logical to him, it is illogical to the audience and the context they are observing. Lucien tries to keep tabs on his surroundings as well, but on a more elementary level. The entirety of his arc revolves around preparing for his court hearing, and he is vigilant about accumulating the items he feels he needs to be successful: large library books, a Spiderman tie, and memorization of the Alphabet Song. Because of this attempt at heightened concentration, his sentence structure is either highly repetitive of what others are saying—"In the tub! In the tub! In the tub!" (63)—or his lines begin with his signature, incorrect grammatical arrangement with the word "be," such as: "It be green," "I be reading good now," or "I gonna be go looking at my books" (8–9, 14).

Jack speaks in careful, logical, contemplative speeches, which is a direct contrast to the choppy, fast-paced, "off the rails" energy in the majority of the play. When he has in-scene dialogue, it is also measured, patient, and caring as he is attempting to reason with each of the men on their individual levels. Barry speaks in full and articulate (albeit largely nonsensical) sentences as well, especially during his golf lessons or therapeutic visits with Mrs. Fremus. This is most noticeable when his bombastic confidence slowly wanes from the moment he finds out his father, the source of his trauma, will be visiting.

Barry speaks in long, run-on sentences at the beginning but, as soon as his dad arrives, Jack has to encourage him to even begin speaking at all. Once Jack leaves the room, Barry's father Mr. Klemper is the only one that says anything for a while and eventually the tense silence spurs him to hit his son. He whimpers "No, Dad! Please, Dad. Don't hit me . . . Please . . ." (50) but, after his father leaves, Barry silent for the rest of the play.

Sheila and Norman enjoy a well-structured dialogue, though it is not always successfully understood by the other and obviously exists at an elementary level due to the simplistic vocabulary. They have a repetitive structure as well, but repetition appears more because of what they have learned by rote than because of what they would have heard in the moment. This indicates a substantial level of retention and gives a clue as to their level of function being moderately high. For example, Sheila brings Norman flowers and explains, "I picked them in that lot near the Getty station. You know that lot?" to which Norman responds, "Getty gas. That's good gas. Would you please like a doughnut" (53)? He has been conditioned by a television or radio commercial to know the Getty gas tagline and immediately repeats it. The entire date scene is full of the best intentions and the worst misunderstandings, including Sheila saying she has to leave at 9:00 p.m. (in one and a half hours) and Norman setting a kitchen timer for the number nine, which results in only a nine-minute date. Regardless of what a neurotypical person would consider a successful date, the two end up having such a good time that, upon Sheila's departure, Norman yells out the window, "Sheila! Come again! Welcome to my home!" and proceeds to throw the doughnuts out the window, offering free doughnuts to anyone who may be passing by and wish to join in the celebration. Also, when he speaks about Sheila at the beginning of the play, he says happily: "I love her and pretty soon

we're going to get married and have one baby boy and one baby girl. And we're gonna always take the baby boy and the baby girl everyplace we go. That's a law we made. Everyplace" (17). Normally, Norman speaks in fairly short sentences, but when he gets excited he shifts to run-on sentences.

Choice of Images

As a props-heavy show along with with characters that find a sense of identity through objects that they can hold and attach themselves to, each character has a particular image per se, such as Norman's keys or Barry's golf clubs. Some of the images have a more symbolic meaning. At one point, Sheila asks what flower Norman would be, then shares that she would be an African violet. As a couple, they play a sweet dance through the awkwardness of budding love, but instead of seeing herself as a shy violet, Sheila identifies with a wild, exotic, vibrant version of what others might expect of her. This speaks to the desire for the self-determination of disabled individuals.

The other item of note is Lucien's Spiderman tie. Though Lucien remains in the background for most of the play, his suddenly-abled speech during his hearing at the State Senate is one of the most important moment due to his extreme switch from barely being able to form sentences to speaking more profoundly than anyone else onstage. There is an anthem within the disabled community that asks impaired individuals "What's your superpower?" Lucien felt the need to equip himself with an outside item (Spiderman tie) to amplify his inner force of strength and courage, and a piece of clothing with a superhero justifies the out-of-body moment when he is able to speak his truth.

Choice of Peculiar Characteristics

There is no dialect used in *The Boys Next Door*, as the locale is neutral; presumably so audiences are able to translate the experiences they witness to their own neighborhoods. Most of the disabled characters have characteristics that could be identified as peculiar, but those perceived quirks are inherent to their identity and would instead be classified as natural rather than a notable oddity.

Most surprises come from the smaller characters, meant to represent the other side of the coin from the key characters. Mr. Klemper, Barry's father, does not have a cognitive disability, but he only has one functioning arm due to an injury he suffered in military service. Mrs. Fremus, Barry's elderly neighbor and well-meaning confidant, has lost most of her hearing in her old age. She was not born with a disability, but she has grown into having one. One of the themes of the play asks, "What constitutes a disability?" The function of these two characters (who were once considered able-bodied) is to be a physical reminder of that question.

The Sound of the Dialogue

The playwright is conscious of the cacophony of his subject matter, and has accordingly structured the action with a thoughtful balance of large riotous group scenes and solitary moments of quiet feelings. If a play can be heard like music, Tom Griffin has given audiences a dynamic symphony. Arnold's terror chirps out from a tiny, flute-like piccolo while Lucien's large, clumsy tuba steadily plods with a rich tone of support and innocent enthusiasm. Barry expertly mans the frantic percussion table, shifting between a fast series of pinging bangs on the xylophone and a stiff snare drum until he crashes into his own cymbals and retreats to a paralyzed state. Norman and Sheila bow

enthusiastically on sweet string instruments, completely out of tune with each other but loving the music anyway. All the while, Jack stands at the helm, trying his best to conduct the earnest group with a tired baton.

At one point, Jack says, “they never change” (57). In fact, *The Boys Next Door* showcases extraordinary moments in the lives of these men and women. At one point Jack, who has all of the advantages afforded to him in the able-bodied world, cannot figure out whether to pity them or to be jealous. He states:

Every Wednesday, we have dances here at the Center. Most of the residents come. They drink punch and eat potato chips and pop balloons and hide in the bathroom and, sooner or later, dance. Some of the multiply handicapped just sit on the fringe and watch. It’s a curious thing. I’ve been coming to these dances for months now and I can never decide if it’s the saddest place I’ve ever been or the happiest. (29-30)

The sound of that question is what the audience hears throughout. In some ways, it never resolves. That complexity, however, is what entices audiences to listen more closely—hopefully translating into listening more closely to their own disabled community.

Structure of Lines and Speeches

All of the key speeches are long and directly address the audience. The playwright establishes the crucial personal relationship between audience and driving characters through Arnold and Jack’s narrations. This sets the groundwork for Lucien’s break out oration to the State Senate. None of these speeches, however, dominate the overall story arc of the boys and their caregiver. Each character fails at one point and each has at least one victory. Griffin guides the audience back and forth between varying perspectives and experiences to ensure that the whole creates something substantial enough to ponder on even after the production has ended.

Dramatic Action

All page numbers below refer to Dramatists Play Service, Inc.,’s version of Tom Griffin’s *The Boys Next Door*.

Units and Summary of Action

1. Unit 1: The Boys and what they bring home (pages 7 – 11)
 - a. Arnold: to plead for the audience’s advice and validation
 - b. Jack: to expose the truth of the boys’ attempted deceptions
2. Unit 2: Welcome to my world, the zoo (pages 12 – 17)
 - a. Arnold: to convince Jack that he doesn’t need to go back
 - b. Jack: to empower and challenge each “boy” to make the best decision
3. Unit 3: So here’s the deal... (pages 17 – 18)
 - a. Jack: to endear the audience to his situation
4. Unit 4: Rats! (pages 18 – 21)
 - a. Arnold: to exile the fiendish foe, save the day, and be the hero
5. Unit 5: “How can you stand it?” (page 21)
 - a. Jack: to validate his life choice by confiding in the audience
6. Unit 6: The Guest Bombs (pages 21 – 25)
 - a. Arnold: to celebrate his victory against his prior mistake
7. Unit 7: Getting Ready (pages 25 – 26)
 - a. Arnold: to confide in someone for protection
 - b. Jack: to inspire Lucien to join the group and go to the dance
8. Unit 8: The Dance 1 – Nervous Excuses (pages 26 – 28)
 - a. Arnold: to trick himself into having the courage to ask a girl to dance

9. Unit 9: “Not my Dad.” (page 28)
 - a. (neither character is in this unit)
10. Unit 10: The Dance 2 – Hard (and Wet) Fails (pages 29 – 30)
 - a. Arnold: to conspire with Jack to cover up his wet pants
 - b. Jack: to empower Norman to ask Sheila to dance
11. Unit 11: Sweet Secrets (pages 30 – 31)
 - a. (neither character is in this unit)
12. Unit 12: The Dance 3 – The Explosion and The Dream (pages 31 – 34)
 - a. Arnold: to impress Jack with the success of his plan
 - b. Jack: to punish Arnold for being mean to Helen and make him apologize
13. Unit 13: Chores, Chaos, and Care (pages 35 – 44)
 - a. Arnold: to rally people to be on his side about the rugs debacle
 - b. Jack: to melt the tensions between the boys so the chores get done
14. Unit 14: Popcorn Shutdowns (pages 44 – 46)
 - a. Arnold: to defy his employer and stand up for what he believes in
15. Unit 15: Barry’s Dad (pages 46 – 50)
 - a. Jack: to protect Barry from his father
16. Unit 16: “I stand before you...” (pages 50 – 52)
 - a. Arnold: to suppress the truth that he is being taken advantage of
 - b. Jack: to comfort Lucien as he navigates through his court hearing
17. Unit 17: The Date (pages 52 – 56)
 - a. Arnold: to decipher how to ask Sheila for the keys back

18. Unit 18: Bedside Confession (pages 56 – 58)

- a. Jack: to ignite Barry back into his healthy self

19. Unit 19: “Surprise!!!” (pages 58 – 64)

- a. Arnold: to pull off the perfect party, then to demand Jack stay with them
- b. Jack: to soothe the boys into understanding about his leaving them

20. Unit 20: “All aboard” (pages 64 – 66)

- a. Arnold: to prove his bravery to Jack
- b. Jack: to earn forgiveness from Arnold

Characters

Arnold Wiggins

1. Desire. Throughout the play, Arnold strives to be necessary and thought of as intelligent and capable. He speaks to the audiences because he has very little in the way of commanding social skills with the boys in the apartment, with the girls at the dance, or in dealing with the bully who treats him poorly at work. Arnold wants to be revered, needed, and loved above all.
2. Will. His determination is all bark and no bite. He threatens diseases and impromptu Russian trips right and left, but when pushed to return groceries to a store that makes him feel small and stupid to enter, his hyper-anxious humanity overpowers. Amidst the four men, Arnold has a higher capacity to venture out and secure such items as party supplies than the others.
3. Moral Stance. Arnold has personally decided to take on the task of being the man in charge when Jack is not there. He thinks the world of Jack and wants Jack to think the world of him, which is why he always tries to control every situation he

can so as to report back to Jack and confirming their status as allies. Arnold wants things to be done correctly, which explains why he asks the audience for confirmation that he did the right thing in his very first speech.

4. Decorum. Arnold cares deeply about what others think of him. When he gets a few drops of urine on himself after using the restroom, he would rather cover it up by splashing more water on it, making up an elaborate story, and insulting a girl he has a crush on than simply let it be, as Norman says he would do if he were in that situation.
5. Summary Adjectives.
 - a. Defensive
 - b. Lonely
 - c. Reactive
 - d. Clever
 - e. Deep-Feeling
6. Initial Character-Mood-Intensity.
 - a. Heartbeat—Racing most of the time. And when it is down, it is being kept down by force.
 - b. Perspiration—As a small man who values cleanliness, if any perspiration may arise, it would be dabbed immediately with a pristine handkerchief.
 - c. Stomach—In the direst of knots *constantly*. When speaking to the audience alone or sitting at the back of the movie theatre, his sensory overload is curbed and may soften slightly until the necessity for human interaction reappears.

- d. Muscles—Taught but tiny. He lives a clenched existence with near-violent aspirations of control, but would never quite have the manpower to intimidate anyone through brute force. Arnold knows he has his brain and does his best to use it for as much impact as possible with friends and foes.
- e. Breathing—Shallow and strained. In the end scene, when he realizes the gravity of what running away would mean, it is probably the first time he has taken a full breath within the entire play. Words are his defense mechanism; he crumbles without anyone to listen. With new breath also comes uprooted, stifled emotions, and assuredly Arnold holds a lot of pent-up fears close to his chest.

Jack Palmer

1. Desire. Jack's wants to know whether he should quit his current job or not, but the deeper inquisition he wants to know why he cannot make this assignment work. During the eight months of this tough job, he battles between his well-meaning efforts of righteousness and his human deficiencies of frustration and outrage. Jack recognizes his need for healthy boundaries, but yearns to know whether that is poorly reflective of his character or truly the best decision for everyone involved.
2. Will. He shows a strong determination to have gotten this far in the job. Still, to have been unable to complete a year in his current position, let alone that he is recently divorced, implies that he may be searching in more ways than one.
3. Moral Stance. The casual way Jack speaks about death, money, and sex at one point in the production suggests he is more liberal than those who would limit the

experiences of the residents. Something drew him to accept this job in the first place, and he has undoubtedly made genuine progress and connections with these men, so his values stem from a sincere foundation.

4. Decorum. Jack cracks a lot of jokes, mostly unsuccessfully and at chiefly inappropriate times per the stories he shares with the audience. He appears relatively unbothered by having seen his ex-wife, but the sting of her not supporting his career choice rang all too true for him still. He is doing his best and is simultaneously aware that these men deserve more than what he is able to give.
5. Summary Adjectives.
 - a. Contemplative/Thoughtful
 - b. Susceptible to Violence
 - c. Caring
 - d. Open
 - e. Earnest
6. Initial Character-Mood-Intensity.
 - a. Heartbeat—Slow and steady, like a bomb that is slowly counting down. At the end of the play, after he has made his decision, his heart is heavy—full and light at the same time. There is grief and relief all in one pulse.
 - b. Perspiration—Generally one bead of sweat at a time whenever his admirable patience wears thin, but works up an unavoidable sweat when he is losing control of the room and himself.
 - c. Stomach—In knots when he is around the boys, which is constantly. The spiral of stress has been intensifying slowly over the entire period of time

described in his exposition, but there is an extra crank present during the action of the play as he anticipates making his decision.

- d. Muscles—Relaxed and focused when making a conscious effort to put patience first. That skill is waning, as Jack tips off the audience about in his first speech, but they are able to see him on both good and bad days.
- e. Breathing—Measured, but getting harder and harder to control.

Idea

Literal Meaning of the Play's Title

The Boys Next Door tells the story of a group of four men who live together in an assisted living apartment complex that is equipped with resources for disabled residents. Though they are all more than thirty years old, they are referred to as the boys because their mental states are handicapped and therefore do not allow for cognitive growth past a certain age. They speak and function at elementary or high school levels, and are treated as younger than they legally are simply because the program they are involved in takes the place of parent-like care. Jack, their supervisor, is also responsible for four additional group homes that would presumably be “next door” to the one the audience has been invited to observe. Also, the apartment complex must be close enough to a non-specialized neighborhood in order for Mrs. Warren’s son’s hamster to make it all the way into Arnold, Lucien, Norman, and Barry’s home.

Symbolic Meaning of the Play's Title

The idea of this group of highly individual men being next door serves to remind the audience that the disabled experience is closer than they may think. The most destructive instrument for the progress of disability rights is separation, as it is for civil

rights in the fight for racial equality. The boys are a complex, heart-forward group of men who deserve every attention and opportunity a community can offer them.

What Is the Play Literally About?

The Boys Next Door showcases a string of momentous occasions in the lives of four men and follows the deliberation of their social worker as he decides whether to stay or leave his job as their support person. Jack reveals the question he is grappling with very early on in the play and, as the action follows the boys around throughout their daily lives, the audience is exposed to the factors that are informing his decision.

What is the Moment of Climax in the Play?

Since Jack's decision is the item that guides the action of the play, the boys' realization of his verdict at the surprise party is the culminating event. The four men and now Sheila, who has been officially added to the mix by then, put everything they can into making Jack's celebration perfect. Therefore, it upsets the boys deeply that he is "quitting them" (63).

Why Do the Characters Make These Climactic Choices?

Jack loses his temper with Arnold at the dance at the end of act one, admitting to the audience: "Every time I lose my temper with these guys, I hate myself for about a week. (*Pause.*) I need a new job. They deserve better. Or I deserve better. Or somebody deserves something" (33). From then on, he has likely made his decision. The second act, then, shows Jack living with his decision, looking for a new job, and tying things up as best he can before leaving these men whom he genuinely cares about—so much so that he knows he is not the right person to care for them.

What is the Result of the Climactic Choices on the Other Characters?

As the boys slowly understand the situation at hand, each man goes into the defensive behavior mechanism that the audience has seen before, though never all at once. Norman throws doughnuts out the window and threatens to go on a hunger strike; Lucien screams, “Jack be leaving us!” over and over again in anguish; Arnold is so upset that he finally makes good on his threat to move to Russia by packing a suitcase and heading to the train station. The only further interactions with the boys after this news is with Arnold, which is fitting, as he is the self-appointed ring leader who would attempt to explain to Lucien and Norman why Jack is leaving when he himself has answers. After some justified pouting, Arnold uses the opportunity to choose a more mature path and say goodbye to Jack with this gracious statement: “Jack, and I emphasize this, you’ve got better behavior patterns than a lot of, I repeat, people” (65). When Jack, the most technically capable man in the story, acknowledges his own incapability, a lasting empathy is created and holds the possibility of sustained growth in the future for all.

Moods

All page numbers below refer to Dramatists Play Service, Inc.’s version of Tom Griffin’s *The Boys Next Door*.

Mood Senses and Mood Image

1. Unit 1: The Boys and what they bring home (pages 7 – 11)
 - a. Sight—innocent-looking kids hiding naughty things behind their backs
 - b. Sound—piles of clumsy items toppling, rustling of stiff paper bags
 - c. Taste—breakfast treats: cereal and doughnuts

- d. Touch—awkward angular objects, slippery and slick
 - e. Smell—paper garbage bags and old library books
 - f. Image—total chaos of post-recess in preschool
2. Unit 2: Welcome to my world, the zoo (pages 12 – 17)
- a. Sight—golf lesson, pacing back and forth angrily across the room
 - b. Sound—loud re-stuffing of paper bags
 - c. Taste—acid reflux taste at the thought of seeing someone you hate
 - d. Touch—soft pat on the back
 - e. Smell—summer breeze that will calm if allowed to come in
 - f. Image—herding cats
3. Unit 3: So here's the deal... (pages 17 – 18)
- a. Sight—pastel golf outfit next to matronly dark, funeral-like colors
 - b. Sound—knitting needles clacking together
 - c. Taste—humidity in the air
 - d. Touch—squeezing fresh grass between fingers
 - e. Smell—warm, wet air of summer
 - f. Image—man gushing on therapist couch while she clips her toenails
4. Unit 4: Rats! (pages 18 – 21)
- a. Sight—slumber party in a horror movie
 - b. Sound—soft socks sneaking around on tiptoes, then wild screaming
 - c. Taste—delicious salivation of suspense
 - d. Touch—softness of a pillow and cold stiffness of a metal bowl
 - e. Smell—stale smell of night when everything is asleep

- f. Image— whack a mole during a heist
5. Unit 5: “How can you stand it?” (page 21)
- a. Sight—contended man holding a sad sandwich
 - b. Sound—birds chirping, distant sound of a train whistle
 - c. Taste—deli turkey slices on rye bread, dab of mustard
 - d. Touch—spikey wood splinters of the train station bench
 - e. Smell—industry: coal, steam, metal
 - f. Image—deserted train that finally arrives but goes nowhere
6. Unit 6: The Guest Bombs (pages 21 – 25)
- a. Sight—grumpy father sitting reading his newspaper, kids disturbing him
 - b. Sound—overly effusive greetings of “Hello! Hi! Welcome! Hi!!!”
 - c. Taste—piping cup of coffee and a refreshing iced tea
 - d. Touch— slightly dirty quality of newspaper and the mail
 - e. Smell—crisp morning air
 - f. Image—Jehovah’s Witnesses
7. Unit 7: Getting Ready (pages 25 – 26)
- a. Sight—black hole of being bullied
 - b. Sound—fire alarm
 - c. Taste—aspirin and burnt toast
 - d. Touch—smooth black polish and sharp shards of metal
 - e. Smell—pungent rag full of used shoe polish
 - f. Image—feeling small and unfinished, like a gray lump of clay

8. Unit 8: The Dance 1 – Nervous Excuses (pages 26 – 28)

- a. Sight—bright colors floating all around
- b. Sound—the squeak of balloons rubbing against each other
- c. Taste—cheap store bought cupcakes with vanilla icing
- d. Touch—sweaty palms wiping on a coarse jacket
- e. Smell—body odor from half bathed teenagers
- f. Image—Saved by the Bell prom

9. Unit 9: “Not my Dad.” (page 28)

- a. Sight—cute old lady not succeeding in raising her golf club
- b. Sound—soothing creak of a rocking chair
- c. Taste—pink lemonade
- d. Touch—smooth leather handle of a golf club
- e. Smell—summer night air
- f. Image—empty black rocking chair with the ghost of Barry’s father inside

10. Unit 10: The Dance 2 – Hard (and Wet) Fails (pages 29 – 30)

- a. Sight—line of nervous participants lining the edge of the dance floor
- b. Sound—nervous clank of fiddling with metal keys
- c. Taste—a tear of sweat dripping down your face, making it in your mouth
- d. Touch—wet khaki pants
- e. Smell—bathroom cleaning products and wet paper towels
- f. Image—Don Quixote and his trusty steed riding out and fumbling

11. Unit 11: Sweet Secrets (pages 30 – 31)

- a. Sight—a golf club swinging too violently
- b. Sound—hushed tones of a whispered confession
- c. Taste—warm broth of ABC soup
- d. Touch—“bumpy”-ness of professional golfers sleeping with their clubs
- e. Smell—fresh dirt put over a new plant
- f. Image—a warm hug that needs no words and knows no barriers

12. Unit 12: The Dance 3 – The Explosion and The Dream (pages 31 – 34)

- a. Sight—dance fight in the middle of the floor that stops the room
- b. Sound—light techno beats of the early 1980s, ending with a waltz
- c. Taste—smiling upon seeing your crush and checking your teeth for bits
- d. Touch—preteens holding each others’ waists on a slow dance
- e. Smell—wet pants and soda pop
- f. Image—Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire sweeping the dance floor

13. Unit 13: Chores, Chaos, and Care (pages 35 – 44)

- a. Sight—housemaids that keep getting distracted
- b. Sound—vacuum roaring
- c. Taste—bubbles floating up from the sink while doing dishes
- d. Touch—soapy water and the sterile softness of a Band-Aid
- e. Smell—lemon Pine-sol and spring blue Windex
- f. Image—running around on a bridezilla’s wedding day

14. Unit 14: Popcorn Shutdowns (pages 44 – 46)

- a. Sight—tiger in a cage
- b. Sound—food being devoured viscosly, including primal grunting sounds
- c. Taste—butter and salt of popcorn kernels
- d. Touch—slippery cooking oil and springy absorbency of maxi pads
- e. Smell—stingy movie theatre carpet
- f. Image—two knights fighting two dragons with popcorn jousting poles

15. Unit 15: Barry's Dad (pages 46 – 50)

- a. Sight—"Welcome Home" crayon sign and crushed chocolate box
- b. Sound—late night bar talk, too loud and lots of swearing
- c. Taste—the worst chocolate in the box that you can't spit out
- d. Touch—dirty, dried stain on 70s velvet couch
- e. Smell—beer, sweat, and spit on someone who's been drinking
- f. Image—dog foaming at the mouth

16. Unit 16: "I stand before you..." (pages 50 – 52)

- a. Sight—single, bright interrogation spotlight
- b. Sound—the echo of large, empty halls of wood
- c. Taste—particles from grinding teeth out of nervousness
- d. Touch—the impersonal stiffness of starched suits
- e. Smell—flames of a plane crashing and burning
- f. Image—a phoenix rising from the ashes

17. Unit 17: The Date (pages 52 – 56)

- a. Sight—plates of doughnuts that look as pretty as flowers
- b. Sound—the crunching of flowers as they are sat upon
- c. Taste—sweet warmth of receiving a gift
- d. Touch—the smooth metal of brand new, super-shiny keys
- e. Smell—extra hair product
- f. Image—engagement proposal

18. Unit 18: Bedside Confession (pages 56 – 58)

- a. Sight—institutional florescent lighting
- b. Sound—the clack of quick shoes down a laminate hallway floor
- c. Taste—medical chemicals in the air
- d. Touch—the uncomfortable drabness of institutionalized clothing
- e. Smell—slight formaldehyde wafting through the closed room
- f. Image—visiting a ghost in a prison cell

19. Unit 19: “Surprise!!!” (pages 58 – 64)

- a. Sight—lights on, lights off, and a vibrant puppet show
- b. Sound—song “Home on the Range!” sung with gusto
- c. Taste—a cloud of spray air freshener that got in your mouth
- d. Touch—soft felt of hand puppets
- e. Smell—a choking amount of aerosol air freshener
- f. Image—medieval Punch and Judy puppet show

20. Unit 20: “All aboard” (pages 64 – 66)

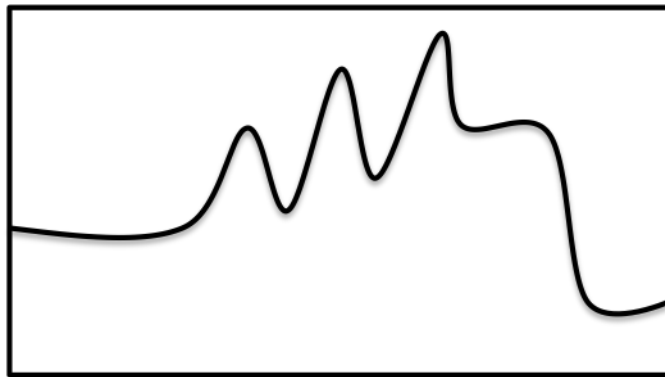
- a. Sight—lonely homeless man sleeping on a bench
- b. Sound—loud pinging announcements and grating train sounds
- c. Taste—a sinking feeling when you’re not sure if anyone’s coming for you
- d. Touch— gentle, soft brown leather of a fading suitcase
- e. Smell—piss on the bench
- f. Image—child running away from home with mother keeping watch

Tempos

All page numbers below refer to Dramatists Play Service, Inc.,’s version of Tom Griffin’s *The Boys Next Door*.

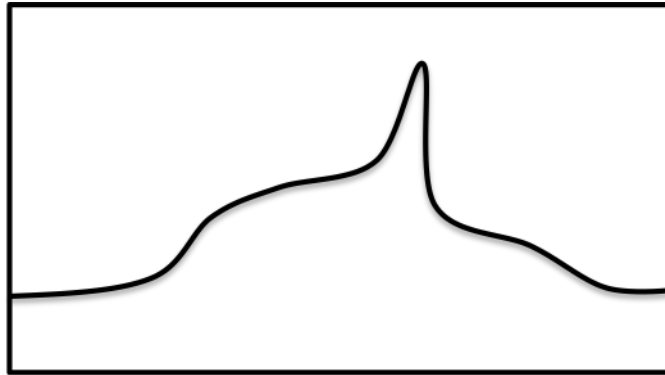
Tempo Charts and Descriptions

1. Unit 1: The Boys and what they bring home (pages 7 – 11)



- a.
- b. The tempo starts moderately steady as Arnold welcomes the audience in as calm and friendly a manner as possible, then the mood escalates as Arnold tells his story of social anxiety at the grocery store. He becomes further agitated (including bursts of panic) as each new character joins the room until finally, after Jack has uncovered everything they were trying to hide, everything turns to a moment of calm.

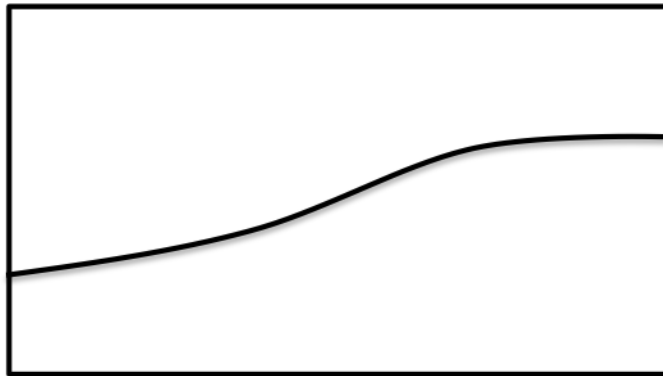
2. Unit 2: Welcome to my world, the zoo (pages 12 – 17)



a.

- b. Jack's informative monologue brings the tempo back down to a calm pace, only to slowly climb up again as he enters the group scene and confronts each of the boys about what they need to change in their current behavior. After one tense "I mean it" moment, the boys agree to do what's right.

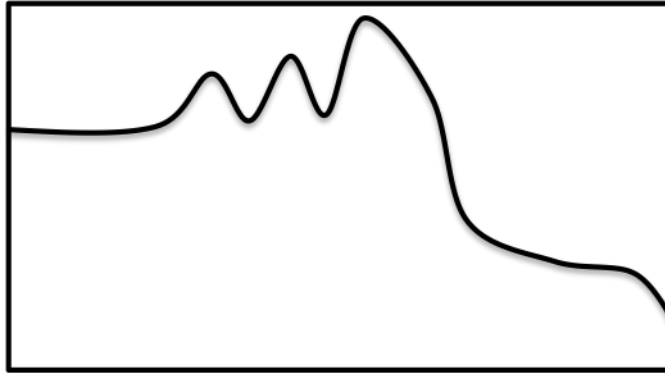
3. Unit 3: So here's the deal... (pages 17 – 18)



a.

- b. Within this short bit of rising action leading into a long, tense scene next, Jack divulges more information (more *delicate* information) about the boys' conditions and Barry tries to talk to a sympathetic ear unsuccessfully—because that ear (of Mrs. Fremus) is almost deaf.

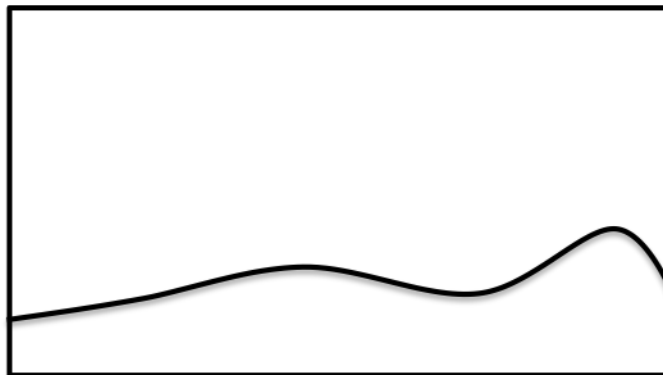
4. Unit 4: Rats! (pages 18 – 21)



a.

- b. The tempo of this rat-catching adventure begins mid-action, so it is already tense. After three upsets of fearing the rat was not vanquished after all, the boys confirm that they have indeed killed it and now have to face the disposal of and the grief over the creature. The scene ends with Barry speaking in the dark about his bad day, with no one listening.

5. Unit 5: “How can you stand it?” (page 21)



a.

- b. Jack enjoys a leisurely lunch by the railroad tracks. Though he tells three stories, none are meant to heighten any urgency. Arnold’s one line at the end serves as a burst of energy, then the pace mellows back down for the next scene.

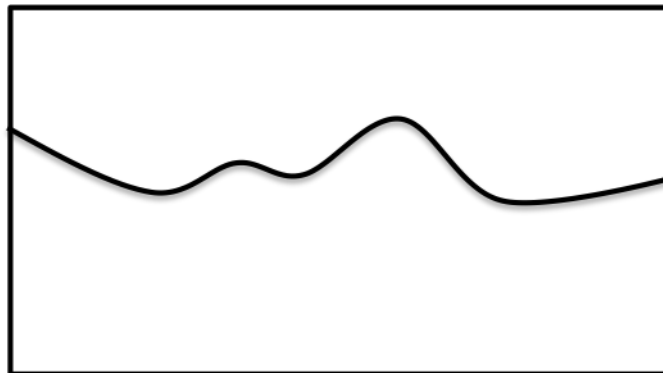
6. Unit 6: The Guest Bombs (pages 21 – 25)



a.

- b. Morning in the apartment. Barry gets agitated by Lucien's trying to talk to him, then the tension rises for him alone when he finds out his father will be visiting. Suddenly, when a new next-door neighbor stops by, the boys go into a fast-paced hosting mode. The situation and the pace get desperate until she finally asks about the hamster her son is missing. The boys realize that the "rat" they killed was not a rat, and they try extra hard to be smooth and appear innocent until she is out the door.

7. Unit 7: Getting Ready (pages 25 – 26)

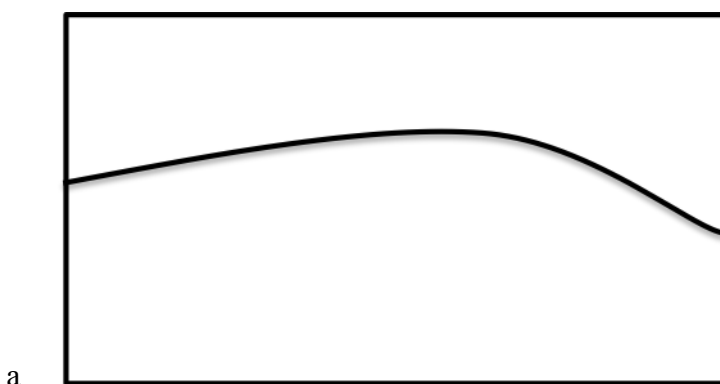


a.

- b. As Arnold begins with another private speech in a dark movie theatre, the tempo is steady but charged. His boss is pleased with his work but a new bully just started and is already picking on Arnold. He regrettably prepares

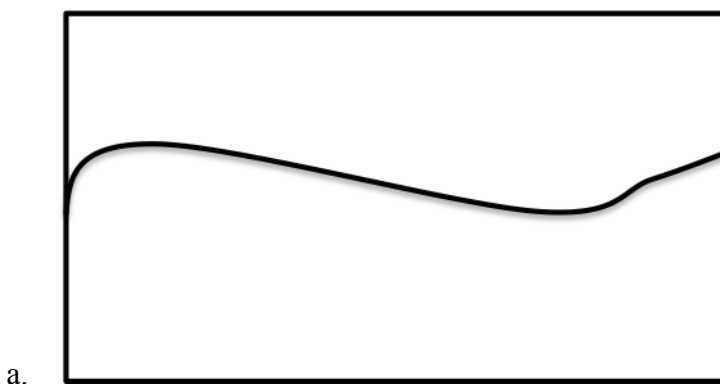
for having to putting emotional armor on while the scene switches to a car horn honking and Jack's trying to persuade Lucien to come with them to the dance. The pace is urgent for Jack, as everyone is in the car waiting. At the end, Jack shares another story (about the last time he lost his temper) that ends rather violently so his tempo continues rising with his blood pressure.

8. Unit 8: The Dance 1 – Nervous Excuses (pages 26 – 28)



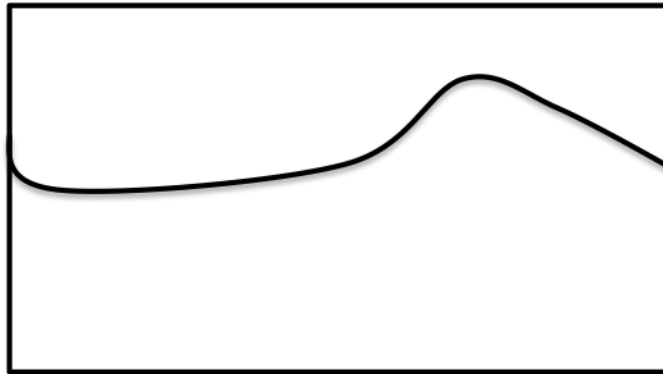
- b. The tempo of the dance is as energetic as the upbeat music. Arnold and Norman fight through nerves to muster up the courage to ask someone to dance—which Arnold decides against at the last minute.

9. Unit 9: “Not my Dad.” (page 28)



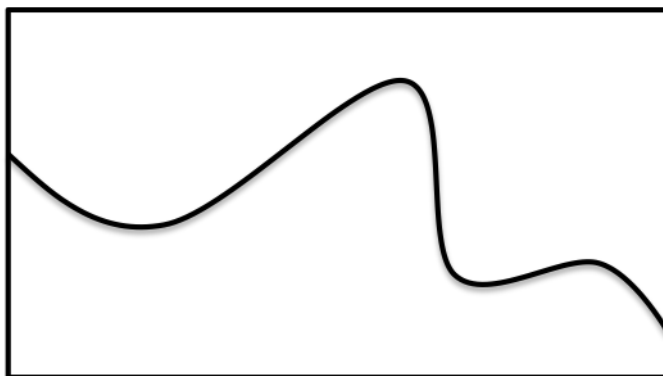
- b. After an awkward, punchy start with a failed golf lesson, Mrs. Fremus defaults to her slow and steady rocking chair pace while Barry accepts defeat and opens up about his dad. The only acceleration in tempo is when Barry's drifts further into his mind, trying desperately to convince himself that this visit will be different.

10. Unit 10: The Dance 2 – Hard (and Wet) Fails (pages 29 – 30)



- a.
- b. Jack asks Norman how the dance is going, and then gently cajoles him to ask Sheila to dance. Arnold enters in a somewhat frenetic state and sells a story about the faucet in the bathroom being broken. After Jack falls for it, Arnold explains that it is not a problem to fix, but rather a genius plot he created to save him from embarrassment.

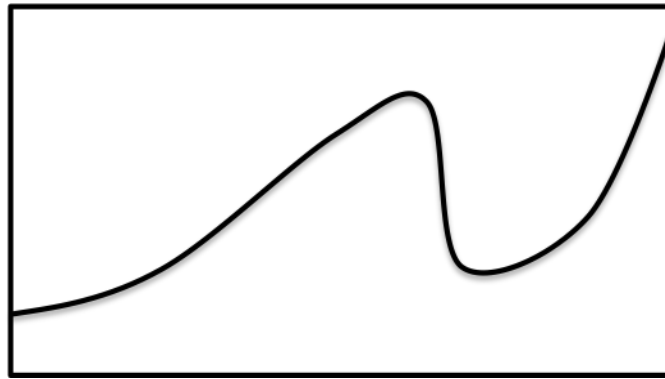
11. Unit 11: Sweet Secrets (pages 30 – 31)



a.

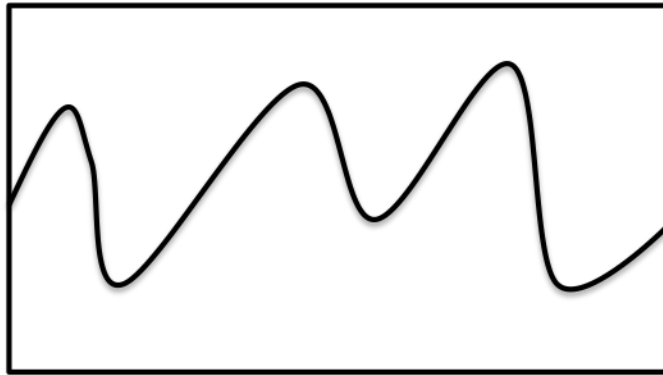
- b. As Lucien calmly (though incorrectly) plants tomatoes back at the apartment, Barry zooms in extremely frustrated that his last potential golf pupil failed. He talks about his dad and golf and almost cracks—the tempo’s speeding up quickly, until he calms himself and tells Lucien a vulnerable secret about how afraid he is of his father. As they each go to bed, the pace of the scene enters a sleepy lull as well.

12. Unit 12: The Dance 3 – The Explosion and The Dream (pages 31 – 34)



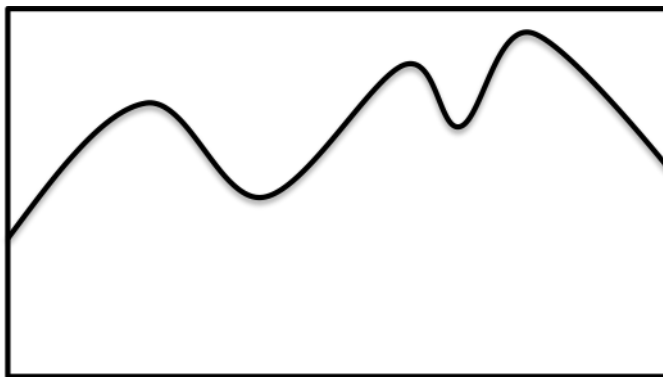
- a.
- b. As the scene wakes up, there is a slow but solid beat and Norman and Sheila finally find each other on the dance floor. When Arnold enters the scene, he rushes in very proud with a spritely pace. Once Jack catches up with him, it’s obvious Jack is angry and Arnold is in trouble. Jack fights Arnold’s nonsensical reason and finally blows up and screams at him. The pace halts, Arnold exits, and Jack speaks to the audience in a slow, self-deprecating way. The scene shifts back to Norman and Sheila who share a defiant moment of pouting about Norman not sharing his keys. The small talk starts up again with the moderately paced music that continues to get more and more sweeping as they are able to break from their impairments and glide across the floor.

13. Unit 13: Chores, Chaos, and Care (pages 35 – 44)



- a.
- b. Returning smoothly yet energetically from intermission, Lucien waves to everybody and starts the tempo off on a solid trot, which Arnold and the boys pick up in growing speed as frustrations around the chores of vacuuming, dishes, etc. mount. Jack rounds out the long escapade with a clipping explanation of what he has perceived the residents encounter about death, money, and sex.

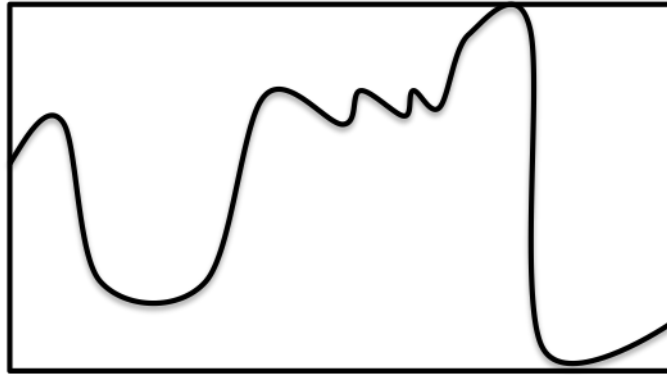
14. Unit 14: Popcorn Shutdowns (pages 44 – 46)



- a.
- b. Clara and Sheila sit on a bench, both with fast energies. Clara eats the popcorn furiously in a territorial fervor and Sheila thrills at seeing Norman. Clara is also territorial of Sheila and she has an outburst. Glimpsing in on the movie theatre, Arnold is also having a confrontation

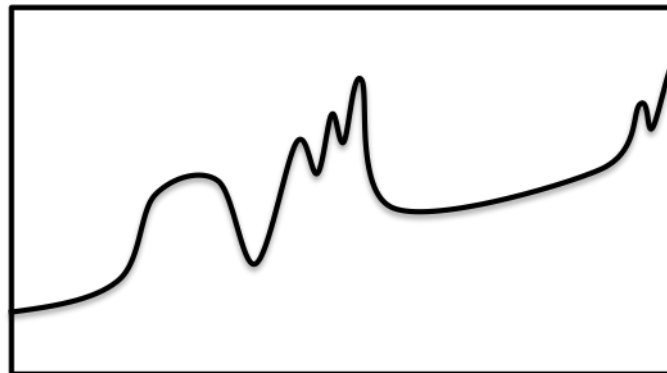
with an outraged boss. Tensions and tempos are high, until Arnold's boss Mr. Corbin laughs after Arnold's dramatic "turn on his heels" exit.

15. Unit 15: Barry's Dad (pages 46 – 50)



- a.
- b. Before Barry's father arrives, the air is cautious and the speed is only at a putter. As soon as Mr. Klemper arrives, he is a bull in a china shop—bombastic, loud, fast, trying too hard. At one point, Jack leaves and Mr. Klemper, uncomfortable with the initial silence, launches into a speech that ends in his hitting Barry, which stops the speed cold dead in its tracks. He tries to apologize, but Barry is already whimpering in a ball.

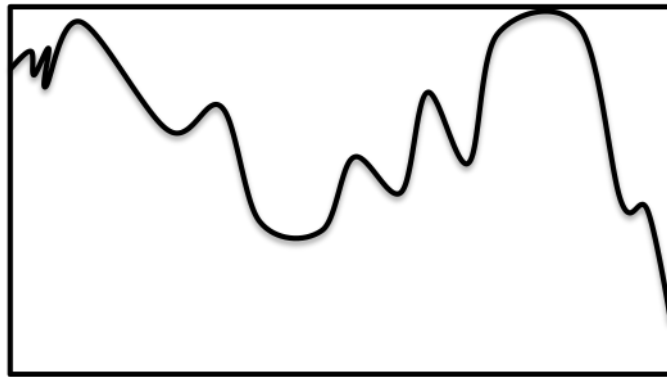
16. Unit 16: "I stand before you..." (pages 50 – 52)



- a.
- b. Arnold begins with a slight sharing about his bully's latest request, and then the scene soars into the sterile tension of a courtroom. It's as if all

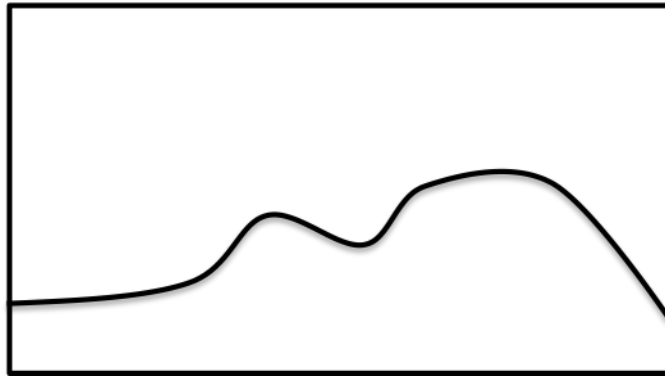
stops for a moment and there is no way out. Lucien becomes more and more uncomfortable, has a few nervous outbursts, and eventually buries his hands in his head, unable to go on. In a sudden magic, Lucien breaks out of his disability to deliver a devastating speech, and the tempo swells to a solid processional pace to carry him. Back in his normal state, he is asked one more question that he cannot answer and panics.

17. Unit 17: The Date (pages 52 – 56)



- a.
- b. Norman is fluttering at a quick tempo, panicked trying to prepare for Sheila to visit his “pad.” After an initial flurry of nervous small talk, there is an awkward lull. The tempo steadily climbs as Sheila gives Norman the flowers she’s brought for him, Norman accidentally sits on them, and Norman gives Sheila her own set of keys. Because of a misunderstanding about time, Sheila suddenly has to go and the tempo climbs even higher with the chaos. Just as they felt when dancing, Norman swells in a quickened celebration and flings doughnuts out the window in triumph. Arnold’s next short speech puts a slight halt on the triumph as he explains that he will have to ask for the Sheila’s keys back because they are from the movie theatre he works at.

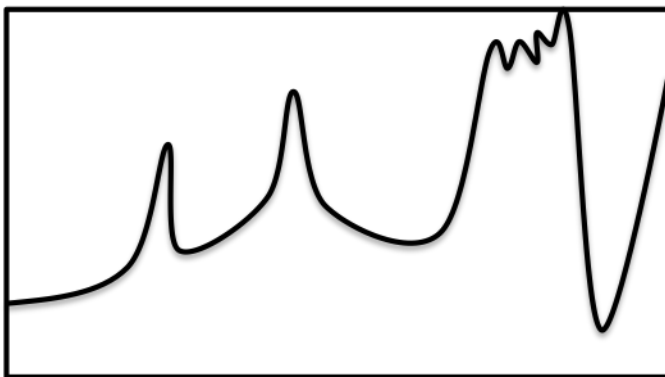
18. Unit 18: Bedside Confession (pages 56 – 58)



a.

- b. Jack sits remorsefully by Barry’s bedside, speaking in an even-paced tone, as if talking to a child. Though Jack tries telling him all about the boys at home, Barry is non-responsive, and Jack moves to speaking to the audience with a slight increase in pace as he talks about the new job he has and his rationale for seizing the opportunity to leave caring for the boys.

19. Unit 19: “Surprise!!!” (pages 58 – 64)



a.

- b. The boys are buzzing with a quick, frantic pace of preparing for Jack’s surprise party, afraid that he will arrive any moment. When the doorbell rings the first time, it is Sheila—a false alarm. Arnold has just enough time to bring out the big party element: puppets! Everyone gets one, the lights are turned off, and Jack enters and acts surprised. After the big

moment, Jack broaches the subject of what the surprise is for in a careful, slower tempo. As the boys catch on that he will not be with them anymore, all hell breaks loose and everyone cries and screams and runs into their bedrooms. Arnold finally resurfaces, suitcase in hand, and storms out.

20. Unit 20: “All aboard” (pages 64 – 66)



a.

- b. Arnold speaks to the audience with a sad limp in his voice. He has had many uncomfortable experiences since running away to Russia, and he is starting to confess that he misses home. When Jack appears, Arnold melts. He is still upset that Jack is leaving and speaks in his usual pattern of speech, but the tempo is slower than normal due to his exhaustion, tested vulnerability, and confirmed loneliness. Jack agrees to take him back and, as they leave, the Train Announcement sounds with a list of cities, the last of which are in Russia. There is a glimmer of a hope and a secret.

CONCLUSION

The Boys Next Door is a sensitive play to produce due to its delicate balance of risk and reward. The level of comedy that this script consistently delivers is understandably seductive; such endurable artistry can be hard to find, especially in comedies. Theatre practitioners, however, must challenge themselves to consider the impact of such a provocative piece on their own community before embarking on its production. Twenty years of persistent performances proves that this play is deeply thought provoking, but each creative team must be extremely specific as to what thoughts their particular mounting intends to spark. One can assume that each theatrical venue, design and production team, and cast of performers choosing to be a part of a piece like *The Boys Next Door* would be well-intentioned—that is, working within the hope that producing this play would increase awareness and empathy for the disabled community. Even the best of intentions can be presumptive, however, so a certain vigilance is required to ensure that *The Boys Next Door* is only ever presented with disability-conscious intentions that are informed and, above all, inclusive. If it cannot be produced with the utmost respect, it should not be produced at all.

The purpose of this thesis production was to explore, understand, and document for future productions what it concretely means to do this play justice. How does someone who is well meaning execute a production of *The Boys Next Door* in a way that is progressive to the perceptions of the disability community rather than a cause for

further detriment? As a piece of theatre, this play has a lot to offer: heartwarming moments of vulnerability and transformation, stark and often costly honesty, a palpable level of connection with a relatively hidden group of individuals, and classically farcical situations that deliver a myriad of hilarity throughout. The issues posed, however, are just as numerous: the use of outdated and potentially offensive terms such as the word, retarded, the fact that the playwright himself was not disabled and thereby appropriated a story outside of his experience, and intentionally celebratory moments of disabled characters becoming abled. Most importantly, prohibiting disabled actors from playing the roles that are representative of their experience could potentially perpetuate the subversively held belief that all disabled individuals wish that they were able-bodied.

The latter was the most conflicting aspect of mounting this production. The two moments known as breakouts (as described in the previous chapters of this thesis) historically tend to serve as the most memorable and moving portions of the show. Some directors see this convention less as breaking away from the characters' impairments, and instead, as inviting the audience to see a glimpse of what it is like from their perspective (i.e., Norman and Sheila dancing like an old Hollywood couple because that is how they feel when they are together, and Lucien bursting forth with eloquent articulation that his bodily functions do not permit him to publically express). Unfortunately, the breakouts may be too subtle for audience members to accept without intentional guidance through staging, production notes, or choice of music.

The primary fear is that audiences—the majority of which will presumably be able-bodied—may interpret these moments as occasions of relief for both themselves and for the afflicted characters. To observe an individual from a marginalized group can be

tense and vulnerable for those who do not share the other's background or perspective. Because of this, a respite from such an experience may generate a solidarity that can be patronizing instead of constructive; as if to say: "Oh good, they're like us!" instead of the more altruistic "Oh wow, we're like them" or, better yet, to erase divisive notions of "us" and "them" all together. Special education teacher Dana Schlosser reminds:

There's always a person with Autism or an autistic person. There are two different ways to look at that. They're humans, and you want to make sure that integrity is there. A disability is part of their life; it isn't their life but it's part of it. . . . I get upset when people say 'Well, your students are challenged and they can't do this.' That's not ok. My students can do anything. I just need to set them up properly for it. (Schlosser)

The more the play's revelatory events can be presented as a disabled individual's present and expansive truth, the more illuminating the sequence can be for an open-minded audience member. The message to convey through the breakout sequences is not that these moments are depictions of their hopes and dreams, but rather of their current, full, existent realities. This is their experience right now; it is as it should be, and there is absolutely nothing to fix.

Above all, those involved in a production of *The Boys Next Door* must never lose sight of the fact that author of the play, including the aforementioned touted insightful speeches, was not himself disabled. Though his characters are obviously highly individual in speech and personality, Tom Griffin freely shared in multiple interviews that the boys' stories were secondhand accounts from a colleague who worked in a center for independent living. Nothing indicates that the playwright did primary, direct research with the men of that institution or any other disability group while compiling the piece. When *The Boys Next Door* was written in 1986, the popularity of Griffin's play suggests that it offered the disabled community more of a platform than any other piece of theatre

had by that time. Such a feat is to be commended, but the play's message must also reflect current times to remain relevant. Individuals with disabilities can, and must, be empowered to speak for themselves in this modern age of diversity consideration and global consciousness.

Individuals have traditionally and continually been discriminated against based on their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, religion, and ability, and the voices of marginalized groups have been usurped consistently for years. It is not one production's job to give diverse groups a voice, as they already have one. The task instead is to create an appropriate *platform* from which a group's authentic voice can be heard—especially when the group is represented in a piece of theatre. Storytellers in this current era of heightened sensitivity, mainly in regard to identity, have a responsibility to bridge the gap of rampant cultural appropriation. For any theatre artist involved in a production of *The Boys Next Door* that do not identify as being part of the disabled community, the approach to the piece must be one of utter humility and voracious openness. The cast and crew may be experts in their craft, but individuals with disabilities are experts of their own experience. Such a foundational contract should be heeded and respected above all. If *The Boys Next Door* intends to create a vessel for positive change in and for the disability community, it is paramount that that population be consulted, and that all involved in the production remain flexible and accommodating. The goal is to be an ally; a resource rather than a barrier. The maxim of the Disability Right Movement began as “Nothing about us without us” (Charlton) and disability self-advocate Talleri McRae proposes the call be further distilled to “Nothing without us” (McRae). The voices of disabled individuals in the arts enrich, not only items that

concern them directly, but also every part of the greater society if offered an inclusive invitation to speak.

When all is said and done, the daunting challenges of producing *The Boys Next Door* are outweighed by the rich opportunities it has to offer as a disability history play. The story is one of beauty, humor, insight, courage, conflict, vulnerability, triumph, and active empathy. It is a touching story, but it is the disabled community's story to tell. Taking conscious efforts to ensure that the driving force of one's production is in their hands and on their terms, and consistent with the voice of their daily lived experience, is crucial to its inherent goal of being a useful piece towards the goals of the population of individuals with disabilities. The reason for choosing to stage this production must be one of increasing empathy and awareness, which will carry the difference between respectful versus exploitative representation. As long as the considerations of disability consciousness and mindful education are in place, *The Boys Next Door* can continue to prevail as one of the most accessible pieces within the disability theatrical canon—brilliantly showcasing the unsung abilities of those with disabilities—and deserves to be produced for many years to come.

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APPENDIX

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DOCUMENTS



Institutional Review Board

DATE: November 15, 2017

TO: Shelby Lewis

FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1150633-1] Sensitivity Expansion and Community Engagement in The Boys Next Door

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: November 15, 2017

EXPIRATION DATE: November 15, 2021

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

Shelby -

Thank you for a clear and thorough IRB application for a very interesting study. All of your materials and protocols are verified/approved exempt. You may begin participant recruitment and data collection.

Best wishes with your research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Megan Stellino, UNC IRB Co-Chair

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.



CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

Sensitivity Expansion and Community Engagement in *The Boys Next Door* Research Portion For Promptbook Thesis

Researcher Name: Shelby Lewis
Researcher Phone: (734) 626-6267
Researcher Email: lewi1636@bears.unco.edu
 Master's Candidate in Theatre Education
 University of Northern Colorado

Research Advisor: Dr. Mary Schuttler
Research Advisor Phone: (970) 351-1926
Research Advisor Email: mary.schuttler@unco.edu
 Instructor and Theatre Education M.A. Advisor
 University of Northern Colorado

Performers,

I am currently in pursuit of my master's degree in Theatre Education through the University of Northern Colorado. My thesis project centers on *The Boys Next Door*, and its focus is to identify the most effective way to make this production as inclusive and progressive as possible for the northern Michigan community. This exploration into more conscientiously sensitive research for character development will hopefully lead to a deepened experience for both the cast members and the audience, as well as generate a respectful depiction of characters with various disabilities that the local disabled community deems as accurate and empowering. I am asking for your permission to include you as part of this project. Please read the information below and if you agree with the terms of this study, please sign one copy of this form on the signature line, return it to the producer of the production before the first rehearsal, and keep the other copy of this consent form for your personal records. If you have any questions about the project or your involvement, please contact me via the email or phone number listed above. Thank you for your consideration and support in attaining my master's degree.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to monitor the effectiveness of different acting exercises, volunteer experiences, and exposure to insights within the disabled community as an enhancement to basic character development.

Participation: Performers will be asked to complete a written response survey at the beginning and end of the production reflecting on their conceptions of the experience of mentally disabled individuals before and after completing the rehearsal and performance processes. Actors will be asked to participate in rehearsal activities that are designed to deepen their empathy towards the disabled population and may involve a few volunteer opportunities a part from rehearsal for individual character research. I predict these experiences will get the performers more in touch

with the mindset of the character(s) they are portraying and help them satisfactorily embody the intricacies necessary to do justice to their portrayal of each character's particular cognitive and/or physical challenge. Data will be collected in three forms: the researcher's written observations in rehearsal and performance kept in a private, digital file on the director's personal laptop; notes from conversations had in rehearsal regarding character development; and written responses via prompts from you before and after the rehearsal process and subsequent performances are complete. The questions to which you will be responding will follow an open-answer format, and will ask you to recount your experiences throughout the rehearsal process and its perceived effect on your performance.

Confidentiality: All data collected will remain confidential. Anonymity and confidentiality are not the same. When data collection is anonymous, researchers and others do not know from whom the information came. Because the researcher will collect data directly from participants, the data will not be anonymous. When data collection is kept confidential, the researcher knows the source but strives to protect the privacy of the information. In any writing and/or discussion regarding the data collected, you will be referred to only by pseudonyms assigned by the researcher or by their character name. All raw data will be kept in a secured file by the researcher. Personally identifiable information will not be shared.

Risks: Risks inherent in this study are no greater than those normally encountered during regular rehearsals. Nonparticipation or withdrawal from the study will not affect your ability to participate in the rehearsal process or performance.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to allow your child to participate in this study and if (s)he begins participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, 25 Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

I agree to participate in the research Ms. Shelby Lewis is conducting for her master's thesis.

Signature of participant _____

Signature of researcher _____